

As you will be aware, it is highly likely that new legislation that will place a cap on the number of branded uniform items that schools can specify will be coming into force ahead of the 2026/27 school year. As it stands, this means that for Back-to-School 2026, schools will only be able to specify a maximum number of branded items as follows:

Primary schools: 3 branded items

Secondary schools: 3 branded items plus a tie

The above caps *include* both day uniform and sports/PE kit as well as school branded bags.

We expect that new statutory (legally enforceable) guidance on uniform will be issued by the Department for Education this Autumn and we will share further details as soon as the DfE confirm to us. However, we equally understand that, as an industry, we urgently need to talk to schools NOW to confirm what uniform items they require, so that orders can be placed in the usual way for next summer. We have therefore produced a guide to how we believe the new guidance will work to enable you to meet with your schools now and agree plans for next year.

This guide will outline:

1. What the cap on branded uniform means
2. The timeline for policy implementation
3. What you need to do now, ahead of implementation
4. What the guidance will say
5. FAQs and advice on how the Government's guidance will operate in practice

We have also provided a form (accessed [here](#)) that can be used when you speak to schools to document any uniform changes they need to make for next year to comply with the new legislation.

Please note that this guide was shared with the DfE prior to publication to ensure it is as accurate as possible.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill and the Government's cap on branded uniform

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill will introduce a cap on **branded** school uniform, which will mean that schools will be limited to:

- 3 branded items for primary schools
- 3 branded items plus a branded tie for secondary schools

What is a 'branded' uniform item?

As defined in the current guidance, the term 'branded item' refers to *any item* of clothing with distinctive characteristics that make it unique to the school or trust. It includes any item that carries the school's name or logo, or the name or logo of the academy trust.

The Government also specifies that 'branded' includes any item which, due to its colour, design, fabric, or any other distinctive characteristics, is only available from particular suppliers. For example, a blazer with a school logo embroidered or sewn onto it, a sweatshirt with a specific-coloured trim, or trousers with a unique style only available from one supplier would all be classed as branded items.

Timeline for implementation

Although the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill is not yet law, it is our understanding that official guidance **will be issued this Autumn, before the Bill comes into force.**

The Government **expects compliance with these rules from September 2026**, at the start of the new school year. **Schools will therefore need to decide on any changes to their uniform policy quickly, so that (a) parents understand what to buy for their children, and (b) schoolwear retailers are able to place stock orders in line with the new policy.**

What you need to do now

We recommend that members do the following ahead of guidance being issued:

- **Talk to all the schools you supply now**, if you have not already done so, about the upcoming changes they will be required to make (see more details below).
- **Inform schools that the new guidance will be issued this Autumn**, but that decisions will need to be made now to fit with uniform supply chains.
 - Reinforce to your contacts within the school that the Schoolwear Association has been given advice by the Department for Education in advance; while it may be subject to change, we should plan on this basis.
- **Explain how the ordering cycle works** and that if a school does not make a timely decision, it is highly likely that the school will not have the uniform they need for next summer.

We have also provided a form that you can use when speaking with your schools to document any uniform changes that they make to allow you to plan for next summer. You can access this [here](#).

What will the new guidance say?

- Schools will only be able to specify 3 compulsory branded items if they are a primary school, or 3 items plus a tie if they are a secondary school, so firstly, they will need to decide what these items will be from summer 2026 onwards
- Schools WILL also be able to specify additional branded day uniform or PE/sports items, but they must be designated as optional. This means the school must offer an alternative non-branded/specific item as well as the optional branded item, so parents have a choice of what to buy. The take up of optional items will likely vary by school/location/parent cohort, so you should take this into account in your planning.
- Aside from the new mandatory caps and provisions around optional items, it is our understanding that the other main aspects of the guidance remain unchanged (i.e. sole supply arrangements, etc). Therefore, we recommend reading the current guidance – [here](#) – as a reference point.

Other considerations

- These changes will undoubtedly negatively impact our industry and risk creating obsolete stock that can no longer be sold to parents. This must be considered and discussed with your schools as part of any changes they propose to make as a result of the legislation.
- Using the provided form linked above, we strongly encourage you to get your schools to confirm in writing the uniform items they wish to mandate and make optional in future to allow you to plan and order accordingly.
- Schools will need to ensure all communications to current and future parents are aligned with uniform suppliers so that parents are correctly informed on what they need to purchase ahead of the next school year.
- It is also worth recording all generic items that schools will be specifying as part of their uniform going forward, as there may be an opportunity to supply these to some parents in future as well. These can be added in the form provided.

Additional guidance and FAQs

This section sets out additional information and advice to support the conversations you will be having with your schools, based on our understanding of what the new statutory guidance will say when published. We advise that you run through this section so that you can answer questions from both schools and parents on how changes to legislation impact uniform rules in practice.

Optional branded items

Schools will be able to specify optional branded items, provided that generic alternatives are also accepted. They will be advised to keep optional items to a minimum as a principle, but pupils will be allowed to continue wearing branded items that were compulsory before the cap was introduced.

Our advice: recommend to schools that previous compulsory branded items that will now be above the cap are retained as optional branded items in future.

Generic alternatives

Schools will be permitted to specify the type of generic garments that pupils must wear to ensure that these items are suitable for school and can communicate these to parents. This may include rules such as limiting external fashion-branded logos, an appropriate skirt length or requiring sufficient opacity in tights.

Our advice: ensure schools set sufficiently robust parameters for generic items, so parents and pupils are clear on what is acceptable.

Contracts

Many retailers have supply contracts in place with their schools, and typically these have a notice period for any uniform changes that is often 12 months. Clearly, there is now less than 12 months to go before schools will need to adhere to the new rules, but unfortunately, we understand this government legislation surpasses any commercial contracts that uniform providers may have put in place.

Our advice: in cases where schools intend to change uniform items with less than 12 months' notice, work with them to at least make these items optional, so you are able to sell any residual stocks through.

Second-hand uniform

The guidance will continue to require schools to ensure that parents of new pupils are made aware of how second-hand uniform can be purchased, and to have relevant arrangements in place before the start of each academic year.

Our advice: clarify with each of your schools how they intend to manage second-hand arrangements from September 2026 and if you can help in this process at all.

Variations in uniform

Schools must assess the impact that variations, such as house colours or year-group-specific items, have on overall costs and on parents' ability to pass items between siblings.

Our advice: Discuss with schools that if they want house colours or different uniforms for specific year groups, this should be coordinated sensibly.

Seasonal clothing requirements

Variations based on season, such as a summer dress, count towards the cap. Schools cannot mandate separate winter and summer uniforms unless these are included within the 3 items.

Our advice: advise schools that they cannot make seasonal uniform variations compulsory unless they are counted towards the cap. They can have items as optional, though – for example, a summer dress can be specified, provided it is not compulsory.

PE kit

Schools will be asked to avoid being overly specific in requirements for PE kit, and to keep the number of items required to a minimum. Kit should be as generic as possible and not differ between sports.

Our advice: we are concerned about this provision for several reasons but would advise that schools can continue to specify additional school-branded items of kit which will be needed for specific sports, provided these are optional. Equally, schools can buy items and loan or gift them to parents/pupils, provided a generic alternative is also possible.

Extra-curricular activities in general

The guidance states that schools should avoid requiring parents to purchase additional uniform for extra-curricular activities, such as sport, music, or drama. This also includes inter-school competitions. Schools may provide such items directly, but pupils must be allowed to wear generic alternatives if they do not wish to use a loaned or gifted item.

Our advice: we are concerned about this provision for several reasons but would advise that schools can continue to specify additional school-branded items of kit which will be needed for specific sports, provided these are optional. Equally, it is possible for schools to buy items and loan or gift them to parents/pupils, provided a generic alternative is also possible.