# Parents challenge Cookstown High’s archaic blazer rule amid uniform cost concerns



Parents of pupils at Cookstown High School have expressed frustration over what they describe as an "archaic" school uniform policy, which enforces a strict dress code that prohibits students from removing their heavy blazers during lessons. This insistence on formal attire has sparked a broader discussion about the relevance and practicality of such policies in modern education, particularly as concerns regarding comfort and affordability increasingly come to the forefront.

The school's uniform requirements are strictly outlined; boys must wear a blazer, clip-on tie, and tailored trousers, while girls have a similarly structured wardrobe that includes skirts and blouses. This rigid adherence to formal wear has been met with criticism from parents who argue that the physical discomfort caused by these heavy garments during the school day is unnecessary and counterproductive to learning.

In a landscape where the financial burden of purchasing school uniforms is scrutinized, the current policy stands out as particularly contentious. As highlighted by recent reports, many families in Northern Ireland face significant costs associated with school uniforms. The government's introduction of a School Uniforms Bill in December 2024, intended to make uniforms more affordable and accessible, underscores the urgency of this issue. Education Minister Paul Givan's commitment to requiring schools to consult with parents and disclose the costs associated with uniforms aims to prevent economic barriers in education while promoting transparency in uniform policies.

Public sentiment appears to align with the need for reform. A recent consultation conducted by the Education Authority garnered nearly 7,500 responses, with a notable 77% of participants advocating for statutory guidance on school uniform policy. Respondents highlighted comfort and financial feasibility as their top priorities, indicating a desire for uniforms that reflect modern societal values rather than outdated traditions.

This shift in perspective about school uniforms is not limited to Cookstown High School. A broader examination reveals that Northern Ireland's uniform policies, which stand in contrast to practices in other countries such as the United States and much of Europe, are increasingly seen as a relic of the past. In many of these other regions, uniforms are not mandated, and discussions around student attire tend to focus on individual expression and comfort.

The financial implications of uniform policies also vary significantly across the UK. While Northern Ireland offers limited one-off payments for families struggling to meet uniform costs, jurisdictions such as Scotland and Wales provide more substantial grants, facilitating better educational equity. The legislative efforts led by Minister Givan could alleviate some of the pressure on local families while addressing the sentiments expressed by frustrated parents.

As more parents voice their concerns over such uniform policies and advocate for change, educational institutions may be compelled to reassess their dress codes. Aiming to balance tradition with the evolving needs of students, schools like Cookstown High School face a critical choice: adapt to a changing social landscape or risk becoming increasingly disconnected from the values of their communities.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/sunday-life/news/parents-of-ni-pupils-hit-out-at-archaic-school-uniform-policy-were-not-in-the-dark-ages/a857602260.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cookstownhighschool.org/uniform> - Cookstown High School's official uniform policy outlines the required attire for both boys and girls, emphasizing a strict dress code. Boys are expected to wear a Cookstown High School blazer, plain black leather shoes, black trousers, a high school clip-on tie, a pale blue shirt, black or dark grey socks, and a navy long-sleeved V-neck pullover. Girls' uniform includes a Cookstown High School blazer, plain black leather shoes with heels not exceeding 5cm, a school navy skirt, a high school clip-on tie, a pale blue blouse, knee-length socks or tights, and a navy long-sleeved V-neck pullover or optional cardigan. The policy also specifies PE uniform requirements and notes that all items should be clearly marked with the pupil's name. Uniforms can be purchased from Wallaces in Cookstown, and the school scarf is available through the Pastoral Vice-Principal or the school office. The policy emphasizes that any pupil attending must follow the dress code in its entirety, with no exceptions.
3. <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/new-law-make-school-uniform-costs-affordable-all> - On 5 December 2024, Education Minister Paul Givan announced the Executive's agreement to prepare a School Uniforms Bill. This legislation aims to require schools to prioritize affordability in their uniform policies. Minister Givan expressed concern that the cost of school uniforms should not deter parents from choosing a particular school. The bill will work alongside strengthened statutory guidance to ensure transparency and affordability in school uniform policies. The legislation will allow schools to determine whether to have a uniform and, if so, what that uniform will be, but it will require schools to consult with parents and pupils and publish the rationale and cost of their uniforms, as well as the range of suppliers from which they can be purchased.
4. <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/consultation-analysis-report-school-uniform-policy-published> - On 12 December 2024, Education Minister Paul Givan welcomed the publication of a report analyzing responses to the School Uniform Policy consultation. The consultation received almost 7,500 responses, with 77% in favor of making guidance on school uniform policy statutory. Over 50% of respondents were children and young people, with cost and comfort being their top priorities. The consultation ran from 20 June 2024 to 27 September 2024, and the Minister committed to bringing forward the necessary legislation in the coming weeks to ensure school uniforms are affordable for all.
5. <https://www.colerainechronicle.co.uk/news/2025/02/19/news/new-bill-to-cut-school-uniform-costs-56076/> - On 19 February 2025, Education Minister Paul Givan introduced the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The bill aims to make school uniforms more affordable by providing necessary powers to address cost concerns. Minister Givan acknowledged the financial burden uniforms can place on families and stated that the bill would work in tandem with strengthened statutory guidance to ensure affordability is central to school uniform policies. The bill requires schools to consult with parents and pupils, publish the rationale and cost of their uniforms, and provide a range of suppliers. It also opens access to the clothing allowance administered by the Education Authority to pupils in independent schools.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-68840505> - On 18 April 2024, BBC News reported that Northern Ireland's school uniform policy is considered an outlier, as many countries, including the United States and a majority in Europe, do not require uniforms. The report highlighted that the cost of uniforms can be a significant financial burden for families, with some qualifying for a one-off payment of about £43 for primary school pupils and £62 or £67 for secondary school pupils. In contrast, Scotland and Wales offer higher grants. Education Minister Paul Givan had previously indicated plans to launch a public consultation on introducing a price cap for school uniforms.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-68840505> - On 18 April 2024, BBC News reported that Northern Ireland's school uniform policy is considered an outlier, as many countries, including the United States and a majority in Europe, do not require uniforms. The report highlighted that the cost of uniforms can be a significant financial burden for families, with some qualifying for a one-off payment of about £43 for primary school pupils and £62 or £67 for secondary school pupils. In contrast, Scotland and Wales offer higher grants. Education Minister Paul Givan had previously indicated plans to launch a public consultation on introducing a price cap for school uniforms.