



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

Aoife Finnegan MLA
Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee for the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
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Sent by email: committee.trousersbill@niassembly.gov.uk

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Dear Aoife,

SCHOOL UNIFORMS (TROUSERS) BILL

Thank you for your letter of 15 September.

I can confirm that the Committee for Education, as Bill Sponsor of the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill, intends to proceed with the legislative passage of this Bill.

While it appears that encouraging developments are in train, the Committee prefers to avoid precarity or ambiguity by ensuring that the right to wear trousers is protected in primary legislation.

I am also delighted to assist your scrutiny of the Bill by providing some commentary and rationale from the Committee for Education in response to points raised by the Department, in the table below.

Should you require any further insight or elaboration, please do not hesitate to ask.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Mathison

**Nick Mathison
Chair
Committee for Education
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Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Education response to Department briefing to the Ad Hoc Committee for the School Uniform (Trousers) Bill

DE commentary/query	CE explanation
The Department considers that amending the School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Act so that, before Guidelines are even mentioned, a statement is inserted about a single item of uniform clothing, is outwith its structure and inconsistent with the approach taken throughout the Act to focus on Guidelines relating to school uniform policies.	The Committee for Education considers that a clear statement of the law to provide the right to wear trousers should be made unequivocally. To situate this at the outset of the guidelines, before they go on to state issues of nuance, is to ensure that schools do not continue to treat this issue as a matter in which they may exercise discretion. The Committee understands that for citizens to access the law it may be preferable to have all relevant provisions read together.
The Department does not consider this statement to be necessary to achieve the stated intent of the Bill and is firmly of the view that it is not appropriate to place any such statement at the outset of the Act.	The Committee for Education considers inclusion of this statement to be critical. The Committee's legislation; and the statement at the top of the guidance; are intended to together ensure accessibility of the measure, communicating it comprehensively and unambiguously to schools and others so that it can be effectively implemented.
Furthermore, the statement as drafted – because it bears no link to Guidelines about school uniform policies, especially given where it is placed by the Bill – does not operate effectively with the powers/ duties set out in the Act as made in terms of the issue of and adherence to School Uniforms Guidelines. It does not operate effectively with the section 8 powers of enforcement in terms of ensuring adherence by schools to the Guidelines. In short, this statement creates a risk of legal uncertainty in terms of how it operates in the context of the Act, including how it is monitored and enforced.	The Committee for Education intends that this preliminary statement of the law should create a legal right and consequent direct route to justiciability via judicial review. The Committee's subsequent amendment to section 2 indeed seeks to align to the structure of the guidance with the intention that the Department can also ensure adherence via the Act's existing powers of enforcement via mandamus/direction. Correspondence was exchanged between the Department and the Committee as to monitoring of implementation of this measure, and conceded that this was not the priority of either.
The Bill's amendment to section 2 is more closely aligned with the structure of the Act, especially in relation to clause 2A(a). The Department has significant concerns about the terminology of clause 2A(b) and considers it to be loose, not aligned with curriculum terminology and open to interpretation. 'Other leg coverings' in particular is a term that the Department considers	The Committee for Education discussed whether to define terms such as trousers and shorts; and decided that terms in common usage were best understood. The Committee heard from stakeholders citing individual rationales for the leg coverings they preferred. For instance, some found leggings most comfortable, while others preferred tracksuit bottoms. The rationales cited ranged over sensory comfort, period dignity, whether or not the garments were bodycon, loose, flowing, figurehugging, etc.



Northern Ireland Assembly

open to misinterpretation. Whilst we understand the wording around “recreational, sporting or outdoor activities” is taken from the Act, it does not provide the curriculum context that section 2(2)(b)(iii) sits within.

The use of the term “other leg coverings” is intended to convey that trousers for PE should cover such a range of garments. It did not go into greater detail because of all the potential variations and lengths, (such as knicker shorts, cycling shorts, capri pants, cargo pants, Bermudas, harem pants, ski pants, jodhpurs etc). DE has described this as “tracksuit bottoms, leggings, shorts, skorts or similar”.

The Committee for Education did not consider this extensive list to include leg warmers. (As these tubular accessories may be worn ruched around the ankle or smoothly from ankle to knee, but do not cover the hips, pelvis or upper thighs, the Committee would not consider them to be commonly understood as trousers and therefore to be outside the remit of the Bill).

The curriculum context is intended to apply to all recreational, sporting or outdoor activities in the school day, timetable, premises, grounds and under school supervision. If PE or games take place somewhere else or are organised externally but still participated in as a school pupil, the Committee anticipates that relevant bodies should comply with the new measure to enable the import of this legislation for uniform rights to have effect in every circumstance.



Aoife Finnegan MLA, Chairperson
Ad Hoc Committee on the School
Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

Ref: SUTB 41/26

15 September 2026

Nick Mathison MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Education

Issued via email to: committee.education@niassembly.gov.uk

Nick, a chara,

School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

At its meeting on 15 September 2026, the Ad Hoc Committee on the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill considered both written and oral evidence from the Department of Education as part of its scrutiny of the Bill.

Following the oral evidence session, the Committee agreed to seek the views of the Committee for Education, as Bill Sponsor, on the Department's written evidence, a copy of which is attached.

The Committee also noted the recent publication of revised uniform guidelines requiring all schools to offer girls the option of wearing trousers as part of their school uniform, including for PE and games. In light of this development, the Committee agreed to seek clarification as to whether the Committee for Education intends to proceed with the Bill in order to establish, in primary legislation, the right of all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform.

At the same meeting, the Committee received oral evidence from the Youth Assembly. Following that session, the Committee agreed to draw to your attention the strong view expressed by the young people that the right of all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform should be enshrined in primary legislation.

The Hansards of both oral evidence sessions will be available [here](#) when published.

I would be grateful for a response by no later than **12.00 noon on Tuesday 22 September 2026**.

Le meas,



**Aoife Finnegan MLA, Chairperson
Ad Hoc Committee on the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill**