

Submitted to School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill
Submitted on 2026-08-21 16:26:58

Introduction

1 Please confirm that you have read the Privacy Notice for Northern Ireland Assembly Committees by clicking the button below.

Yes, I have read the Privacy Notice.:
Yes

2 Do you consent to your submission being published on the Committee's website and included in the Committee's report?

Yes. Publish in full.

3 What is your name?

Name:
Schoolwear Association

4 What is your email address?

Email:
[REDACTED]

5 Are you responding as:

Another organisation - please provide details.

Please provide further details here, if relevant.:

We are the official trade body for over 200 specialist school uniform suppliers and retailers.

6 What is your gender?

Prefer not to say

Purpose of the Bill

7 Do you agree with the purpose of the Bill?

Yes

Do you have any further comments?:

The Schoolwear Association supports the purpose of the Bill and the principle that all pupils should have the option to wear trousers as part of their school uniform.

We believe this move would be compatible with the wider benefits of having a clear and defined school uniform policy. Providing pupils with an appropriate choice of permitted uniform items can support their comfort, dignity and ability to participate fully in school life, while maintaining the shared identity and consistency that school uniform provides.

Feedback from Schoolwear Association members in Northern Ireland indicates that many schools already allow pupils to choose between trousers and skirts. The legislation would therefore formalise an option that is already available in many schools and ensure that it is consistently available to pupils across Northern Ireland. We support this, as it gives pupils greater choice over the uniform option that best reflects their individual circumstances, comfort and preferences, while maintaining the benefits of a clear and consistent school uniform policy.

At the same time, we believe schools should retain appropriate flexibility over the design and operation of their wider uniform policies, reflecting the needs of their pupils and school communities. Schools are best placed to make these decisions because they understand the needs and circumstances of their pupils and local communities. In this respect, the Bill establishes a basic entitlement for pupils while allowing schools to continue making wider decisions about their own uniform policies.

8 Do you foresee any unintended consequences of the Bill?

No

If you have answered 'yes', please provide details:

We do not currently foresee any material unintended consequences arising from the Bill.

Feedback from our members in Northern Ireland suggests that offering pupils the choice of trousers or skirts is already common practice across many schools. The Bill would therefore largely formalise an existing approach rather than require a fundamental change to the way in which school uniform policies operate.

We would expect that it will be possible to incorporate this change within schools' existing uniform arrangements while retaining their ability to determine the wider content and design of their uniform policies.

Clauses of the Bill

Clause 1

9 Do you think Clause 1 will have the effects that are anticipated?

I believe Clause 1 will have some of the anticipated effects.

If you have answered that Clause 1 will only have some of the anticipated effects, or won't have the anticipated effects, please provide details.:

The Schoolwear Association believes that Clause 1 is likely to contribute to several of the effects identified by the Committee by ensuring that every pupil has the option to wear trousers, or appropriate leg coverings when participating in recreational, sporting or outdoor activities.

For pupils who choose to wear trousers, having that option may support comfort, dignity, confidence, mobility and participation in school life. Establishing the same entitlement for all pupils can also support inclusive and consistent school uniform policies.

However, the impact of the legislation will necessarily depend on individual choice. Pupils and their parents should remain able to decide which permitted uniform option is most appropriate for their personal circumstances.

However, the introduction of a right to wear trousers will not by itself address all the wider welfare issues identified by the Committee. Schools must consequently continue to maintain strong safeguarding policies which protect all pupils, irrespective of the uniform option they choose. The availability of trousers should complement these arrangements.

Our members in Northern Ireland also report that many schools already provide pupils with a trousers option. The practical impact of Clause 1 may therefore be relatively limited in those schools, although putting the entitlement on a statutory footing would ensure that the choice is available consistently across all schools.

Clause 2

10 It is appropriate for the DE to also publish its guidelines on school uniforms.

Agree

Do you have any further comments? :

Clause 3

11 Do you have any comments on this Clause?

No

If you have answered 'yes', please provide details.:

Financial effects of the Bill

12 The financial effects of the Bill will be minimal. (See Paragraphs 19 and 20 of the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum.)

Agree

Do you have any further comments? :

Based on feedback from Schoolwear Association members operating in Northern Ireland, we agree that the financial effects of the Bill are likely to be minimal.

As the Bill expands the range of permitted uniform options rather than requiring pupils to purchase additional items, we do not expect it to create any costs for either parents or schools.

Additionally, our understanding is that many schools already permit pupils to wear trousers as an alternative to skirts. The Bill would therefore largely formalise existing practice rather than introduce an entirely new type of uniform requirement across the school system.

We would consequently not expect the legislation itself to result in significant changes to existing school uniform provision.

Additional Comments and Observations

13 Additional comments and observations

Comment Box :

The Schoolwear Association believes that school uniform continues to play an important role in school life. A clear and consistently applied uniform policy helps to create a shared school identity, reduce visible inequalities between pupils, support academic attainment and behaviour and create an environment in which pupils arrive at school ready to learn. Uniform policies can also support schools in maintaining clear expectations around behaviour and safeguarding.

We believe these benefits are entirely compatible with giving pupils appropriate choice within a defined uniform policy. Providing all pupils with the option of wearing trousers enables individual circumstances and preferences to be accommodated while retaining the wider benefits of a common school uniform.

It remains important that schools have sufficient flexibility to design and implement uniform policies that reflect the needs of their pupils and communities. The statutory right proposed by the Bill should therefore sit within that wider principle of school autonomy rather than lead to unnecessary prescription over other aspects of uniform policy.