

# PLYMOUTH YOUTH CABINET

Views on Schools Uniform Policies, December 2022



The following information has been provided by Scarlet who was elected to Youth Parliament by her peers across Plymouth on the follow election campaign.

## Uniforms in Schools- Dress Code

- Schools are so strict with dress codes we need to challenge the rules and try and allow for a more relaxed approach
- Allow more freedom for young people to be comfortable and able to express themselves
- Allowing students to try a relaxed approach would improve mental health and self-esteem

My name is Scarlet and I was elected in February 2021. At Plymouth Youth Parliament, our youth council were given copies of local school uniform policies and asked questions based on these policies. This was for my campaign on 'Uniforms on school and changing rules'.

This report is meant as an insight of what young people in Plymouth think of school uniform policies overall and we have made some suggestions on how to change them. The baseline uniform policies have not been updated for many years and I think they should be changed.

Earlier this year Plymouth Youth Parliament sent a questionnaire to teachers in secondary schools asking for views on the uniform policy at schools but we only had 24 replies and it seemed some teachers seemed hesitant to put the information down because of concerns about how it might be used. We therefore had to look at other ways in which to work to gather information on school uniform policies. We decided as a youth cabinet to review the answers and all of the school uniform policies that we could access online. We then had our own discussions and have highlighted key points below from each question we had asked.

### 1. Does this policy allow students to wear any optional uniform?

In our first question, many of our youth parliament members said that most of the policies we reviewed did have optional uniforms that could be worn by most students; however, personal belongings were not permitted. This can cause many issues to arise with young people. One of our members said "This policy restricts personal belongings or any optional uniform. Freedom of expression is limited, mental health in youth?" This quote shows me how young people value their self expression and individuality in school. We think that as schools, you could promote individuality with the uniform more. For example, less strictness on how uniforms could be worn or having more options for students to wear with their uniforms.

### 2. Does this policy provide any leeway on how its uniform should be worn?

In our second question, many of us said that there is no leeway on how the uniform should be worn. People said things like "no leeway on policy, could be sent home if standards are not met" and "no, the uniform policy has strict standards on how it should be worn." This shows that our young people want to be provided with opportunities to transgress from the typical cohesion you find when students wear the same items in the same way as one another. As schools, we think there should be allowances on how uniforms should be worn. For example, the length of ties or the colour of socks. As much as professionalism is required in a school environment, these examples shouldn't be met with after school detentions or temporary exclusion.

### 3. How much of this uniform could be bought in shops?

When we asked our young people our third question, many replied with the same answer “shirts and shoes can be bought from local supermarkets”. To me, this shows how schools are making an effort to support the working class/poorer families. However, this is the first of many steps schools need to take in order for those students to be able to afford uniforms. For example, blazers and skirts cost a lot, meaning that when a child moves up to secondary school they will not be met with the same treatment primary schools provided. To help tackle this, we suggest making skirts and blazers cheaper or allow students to purchase them from generic shops.

### 4. Does this uniform policy allow anything to be removed with permission? E.g blazers, jumpers

When faced with our fourth question, a lot of our young people revealed to us that schools do not allow for blazers/ jumpers to be removed without permission. This may not be a concern in the winter, however temperatures can rise to at least 30 degrees Celsius and students who do not remove blazers and/or jumpers can risk severe dehydration and possibly fainting. We believe there is a simple solution to this, all schools should allow students to take off removable layers of clothing in hot conditions. If necessary, set a certain temperature it has to be over for it to be considered “hot” to implement this plan of action with teachers and staff. Students will feel safer coming into school in the summertime.

### 5. Other than the official uniform, what (if anything) can students wear with their uniforms?

Our young people commented on our fifth question that there was “no mention of being able to wear anything personal belongings” on many of the uniform policies we looked at. Many students have jewellery they feel connected to in some ways so having this uncertainty can leave students with anxiety about taking it off. Many of our young people reported that staff members “take our belongings away aggressively” which is not the way these situations should be approached. The solution to this is:

- a.) Provide detail on online websites about whether jewellery is allowed or not
- b.) Approach situations where students are seen wearing jewellery more calmly and efficiently.

This will provide students with certainty and relieves anxiety about getting things broken or stolen.

### 6. Is there anything about this uniform policy you think could be improved on?

Many of our young people raised concerns with our sixth question. They mentioned how schools should “provide more leeway with piercings and coloured hair”. Our young people raised their concerns about being treated unfairly in their school due to the colour of their hair or the piercings they have. This usually happens after a school holiday or time off. A simple way to solve this problem is to allow more opportunities for students to take piercings out or to re-dye hair back to its original colour. Or you could accept it and promote diversity in your school.

### 7. Would you consider this policy to be gender neutral?

There were very mixed reviews about our seventh question. Some of our young people stated that the uniform provided by their school doesn't change for different genders. However, most of our young people said the opposite and uniforms were gender specific. They said that they feel like implementation of the dress code is targeted towards females and the males get off freely. The solution to this could be providing gender-neutral uniforms in school with some flexibility.

8. Is there any optional PE kit (if any) that students can wear?

Our eighth question was about PE kits. Many of our young people said they felt the kit sexualises the girls and think that male teachers often stare at them which makes them feel uncomfortable. They also stated they consider it very sexist and is very revealing. They also stated that in most cases you aren't allowed to wear your own jacket unless it is provided by the school. A solution to this could be making the PE kits more gender neutral so women and girls don't feel uncomfortable doing sports.

9. Does this uniform policy include sixth form students?

We asked our sixth form students for their take on their uniform for the ninth question. They said that they have a uniform very similar to that of the regular uniform and it's difficult to differentiate between the two. This can cause a lot of problems in the school environment. Despite this, some of our students claimed that their sixth form dress code was just "smart-casual" and didn't require uniforms. A solution to this problem would be setting a separate uniform policy for sixth form students so they don't look like the rest of the students.

10. Is there anything you would change about your policy (if it includes sixth form)?

Our final question asked what young people would change about their uniform. Many of them stated that there were lots they would change whilst others stated that it was fine but could do with one or two adjustments. Most students said the rules on hair colour and piercings should change and there should also be more leniency in how things should be worn.

Overall, I can infer that students are unhappy with their uniform policies and that they need to be changed/updated. Please follow the tips and solutions provided to help your students feel happy and safe in their school uniform.