

“Change all uniform to be comfortable and cheap”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Consultation on National School Uniform Guidance

Introduction

The Scottish Government are committed to producing statutory guidelines on school uniform with the aim of reducing costs for families. School uniform plays a significant role in children's lives, alongside children's right to have a say and have their views considered on issues relevant to their lives, the Scottish Government commissioned Children's Parliament to undertake a consultation with primary aged children on school uniform.

With incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law in progress,

the consultation supports the Scottish Government's aim to realise children's participation rights.

The consultation took place between September and November 2022.



“Understand kids need to wear what they like not just what you like. It’s their families who have to pay for it and it’s the kids who have to wear it”

- Member of Children's Parliament, Aberdeen

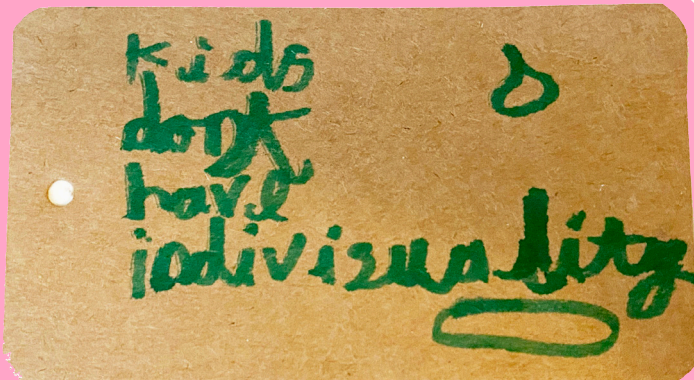
A Children's Rights Approach

Children's Parliament takes a children's rights approach, meaning our work is guided by the principles and furthers the realisation of the rights of all children as outlined in the UNCRC.

The UNCRC states that children have the right to be listened to and taken seriously. This consultation highlights the importance of fulfilling children's human rights in Scotland by including and valuing their contributions to policy areas which have a direct impact on their lives.

With legal incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots Law pending, the meaningful participation of children in decisions which affect their daily lives is an essential step in ensuring children in Scotland can live happy, healthy and safe lives. Children's human rights are universal, they are not earned, and they cannot be taken away. Dignity is central to children's human rights. These principles have informed and guided this consultation.

Children's Parliament uses creative arts-based activities when working with children to help build relationships, give children space to express their ideas, to share their views and opinions and to have fun.



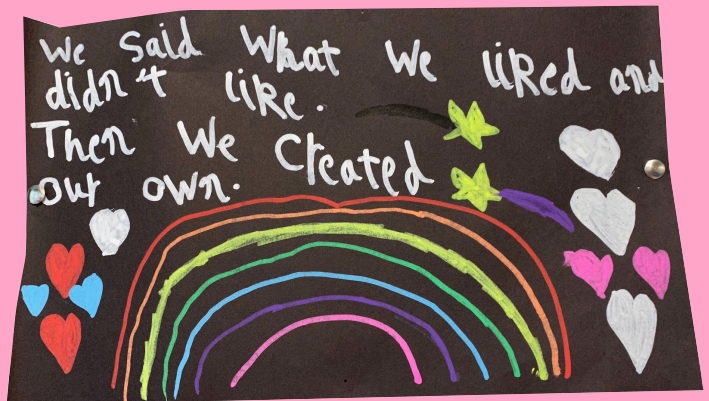
Methodology

Children's Parliament engaged with over 100 children aged between 6 and 11 from 3 primary schools across Scotland. In each school a different age group participated:

- Stoneywood Primary School in Aberdeen - Primary 2 children
- St Serf's Primary School in Clackmannanshire - Primary 4 children
- Bruntsfield Primary School in Edinburgh - Primary 6 children

The consultation was framed around the following areas:

- Children's general views on uniform.
- Why uniform matters to children or not.
- What children see as the benefits or drawbacks of a uniform.
- Children's views on uniform as it relates to issues of equality and inclusion.
- Children's ideas on how to bring the cost of uniform down.
- Children's views on specific items of uniform.
- Children's views on consequences of not wearing uniform.



Workshop 1: Children’s Human Rights

This workshop provided an introduction to children’s human rights. The children were introduced to the UNCRC and shared their views on being Happy, Healthy and Safe; children learned about the importance of sharing their views with decision makers and were introduced to the consultation topic. The session introduced children

to Children’s Parliament and developed their knowledge and skills on rights and participation, building relationships and confidence for the next workshop. The children were also able to start thinking about their views on uniform by creating a “washing line” of what they did and did not like about their school uniform.

Workshop 2: An exploration of school uniform

In this session, the children explored their views on school uniform in greater detail in line with the research questions. They undertook a variety of creative and fun activities to further explore their views, these included:

- **Uniforms around the world:** the children looked at photos of school children from around the world who were wearing a variety of uniforms or no uniforms at all. This

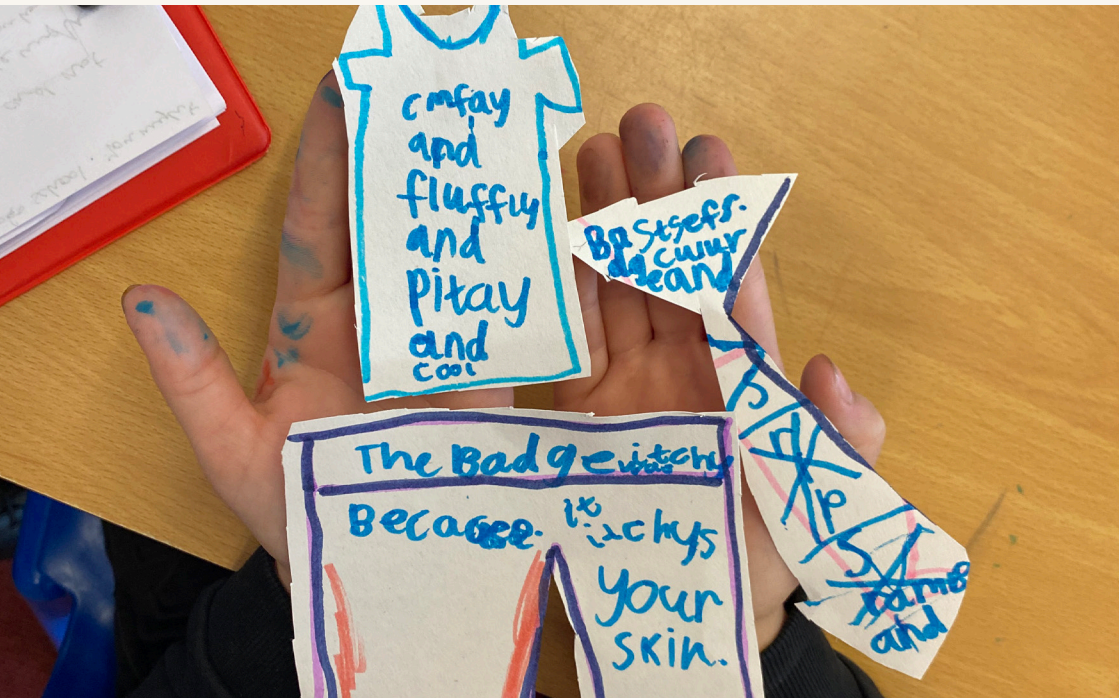
opened up their perspectives on uniforms in general and helped them to compare other uniforms and no uniforms to their own experiences.

- **Port and Starboard:** the children then played an active game of “port / starboard” outside in their playground. The game required them to run about and hold shapes, after which the children were asked to think about the impact their uniform had on their ability to play.

- **Adverts:** The older children also created a series of adverts either promoting the wearing of uniform or clothing of their own choice. This required them to consider the pros and cons of uniform, including cost issues.
- **Catwalk:** Finally, the children created their own “ideal” uniform from craft materials to put on a show on their own fashion runway in the classroom. This encouraged them to design their own uniform.

Around these activities Children’s Parliament staff facilitated conversations with the children to explore their views, ideas and opinions in more depth.

In addition to the work with the three schools, Children’s Parliament met with Members of Children’s Parliament (MCPs) who had participated in the Gender Equality in Education and Learning project, to seek their views and insight on the impact of gender on uniform. The full report on their wider project can be found [here](#)¹.



THEMES EMERGING FROM THE CONSULTATION REGARDING CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON SCHOOL UNIFORM

Several consistent themes emerged from the consultation which highlight the predominant views the children held in relation to school uniform.

In the initial workshop where the children were asked the question “On a scale of one to ten, how do you like wearing school uniform?” the snapshot view of the children showed that the older children tended not to enjoy wearing their uniform. The younger children were divided between those who did not like it at all, and those who really enjoyed wearing their uniform. Through the workshop activities and talking with the children in more depth it was clear that their views on school uniform were far more nuanced. However, all the themes were informed by a common thread of children wanting to be free to move and play as well as be comfortable to enable them to enjoy learning.

The following themes emerged from an analysis of the children's work: comfort, cost, identity, choice, safety, consequences, and gender.



A handwritten list of seven themes in blue ink, arranged in a roughly circular pattern. The words are: 'comfort' at the top left, 'cost' below it, 'safety' at the bottom left, 'identity' at the top center, 'choice' at the bottom center, 'consequences' at the bottom right, and 'gender' at the top right.

COMFORT

“It makes me feel hot as the school trousers are hard to run in and as I’m a sporty guy, they [trousers] don’t really have stretch”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Children across the age ranges were keen to emphasise the importance of comfort in the clothes they wore to school. The children spoke of being too hot or too cold, and how their clothes did not suit the weather. The feeling of the material they wore was frequently mentioned, especially material which was restrictive or itchy. Girls spoke of their tops being see-through which caused them to be self-conscious and the boys often found their school trousers to be tight around the top when they sat down, restricting their movement. Younger children spoke of the need for ease and speed of access for putting on and removing clothing especially when going to the toilet or getting changed for P.E.

“Uniform takes too long to get into”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The younger children spoke about the ease of putting on clothes in relation to feeling independent:

“You need Velcro because you need your teacher to tie your laces”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Following outdoor and active activities, the younger children spoke of feeling uncomfortable in layers of clothing which were difficult to put on or take off and suggested items of clothing such as cardigans to make taking off layers of clothing easier.

“If it’s a super-hot day you can’t change out of your super-hot tights”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The children across the age range spoke of feelings of itchiness related to their uniform - with the words “itchy” and “scratchy” being frequently cited by the children. In some cases, this was related to the materials used in their uniform. Many of the children said that they would like to see fluffier or breathable fabrics used to make school clothes:

“Make the material less itchy and breathable”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

A number of children spoke about the way their school badge was attached as a source of discomfort. The older children spoke of feelings of itchiness, especially around the school badge on account of where and how it was attached to their uniforms. Girls in particular said the badge location irritated the skin around their nipple and that they had to wear a bra or vest to stop the irritation.

“I really don’t like the logo because it scratches me, so I need to wear a bra”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

When asked what would make their uniform more comfortable, the children spoke of the need for stretch material to allow for movement and to prevent sweating. Some children suggested that both boys and girls should be able to wear joggers as they were “comfy, stretchy and warm”.

Amongst older children it was acknowledged that girls were allowed to wear leggings, but boys could not wear joggers, and this was seen as being unfair.

“Girls wear leggings which are more stretchy for running”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Girls also shared how items of uniform can cause embarrassment which impacts their confidence:

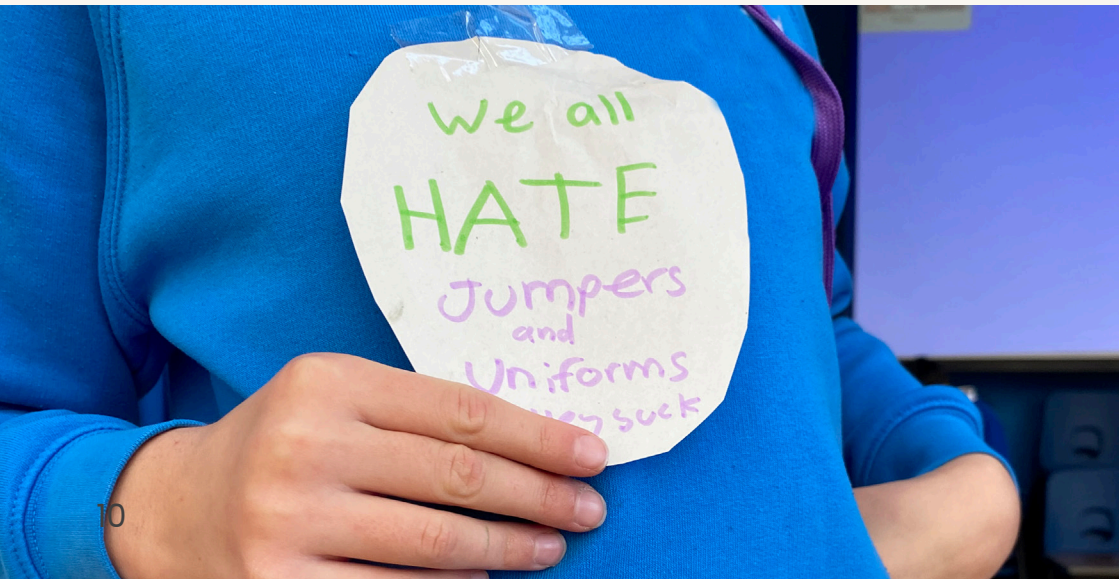
“[uniform] can be thin and see-through materials: some kids feel insecure about that”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

Boys’ concerns centred around their trousers, and how they felt restricted when taking part in activities and even when they sat down:

“When I sit down, my trousers are too tight around the top”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen



COST

The economics of school uniform loomed large with all the children who took part in the consultation. Children recognised that buying uniform was often at the cost of other necessities in the home with even the younger children able to highlight the pressures parents may face in providing a school uniform:

“[You] don’t want it to be too expensive, it needs to be easy to buy”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

“You have to save your money on your food and clothes so it’s easier to buy”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Children also recognised the ongoing cost of buying a uniform as a child progresses through school and how this would place additional pressures on families.

“You have to buy school uniform every year because it gets smaller”[as a child grows]

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

With others considering the impact the cost of uniform would have on life outside of school.

“[it’s] not affordable to get school shoes all the time, you might only get school shoes then wear them everywhere not just school”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

The children were given the opportunity to explore ways in which uniform could be made less expensive by creating adverts to present to their class and these adverts were subsequently discussed by the children. One of the suggestions the children proposed to make uniform cheaper was to offer special deals with a set price for an outfit to make buying it easier for families. For example, in one of the adverts the children created they came up with a uniform set of school top and trousers for a set price in a variety of colours:

“It also comes in all the house colours, and it’s really cheap! A t-shirt, a pair of shorts and a pair of trousers for only £7!”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

In these adverts, the children spoke of specific shops for people to buy their uniform such as Sainsbury’s or Marks and Spencer with the possibility of discounts for people buying school uniform for their children. Again, demonstrating the theme that children wanted to make sure uniform was affordable.

The cost effectiveness of wearing a uniform or not was a topic which came up in the children’s adverts. And the children showed a difference of opinions on this issue. Some felt that not wearing uniform was an indication that the child’s family were unable to afford to buy it:

“You might not wear uniform because you don’t have money”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

This was alongside concerns that families may have other financial concerns and the purchasing of a school uniform would be secondary to the family’s other needs: This view was expressed in one of the children’s adverts:

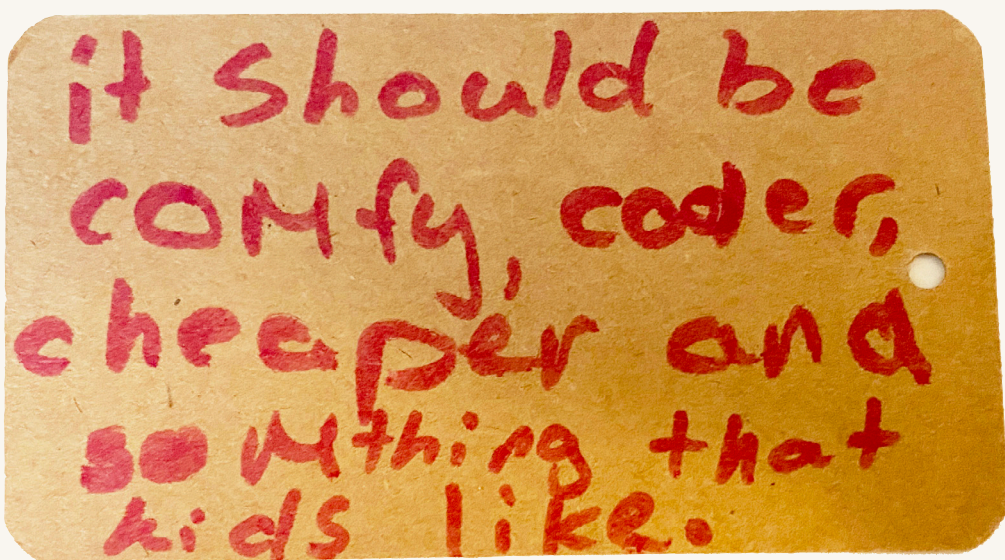
“They’re too expensive! Parents must spend their money on other things. At the moment with the cost-of-living crisis they need to spend their money on other things like food.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

However, there were some children who felt that wearing a wearing uniform would alleviate family financial concerns as children would not feel pressured to wear expensive clothes:

“Let’s say you were going to school and everyone was wearing expensive companies and you can’t afford it. If you’re wearing school uniform, everyone is wearing the same.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh



IDENTITY

The topic of uniform and personal identity was a key issue for the children. Many children felt a uniform prevented them from expressing themselves or developing their own identity.

“Some people find it difficult to express themselves with words, so they use clothes”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Older children were keen to stress that uniform infringed their self-expression with some believing that uniform should be abolished.

“I want school uniform to be banned, it doesn’t let you be yourself”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

“I don’t think that we should have a uniform because it’s uncomfortable and because everybody should be unique and that is not helping it. Also, it goes against freedom of expression.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Younger children recognised the role the uniform could play in giving them a sense of identity and belonging, with one child explaining that their uniform and their badge specifically were special, as it showed they were part of the school:

“Without the badge, it’s just a green jumper”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

And some of the children equated uniform with equality:

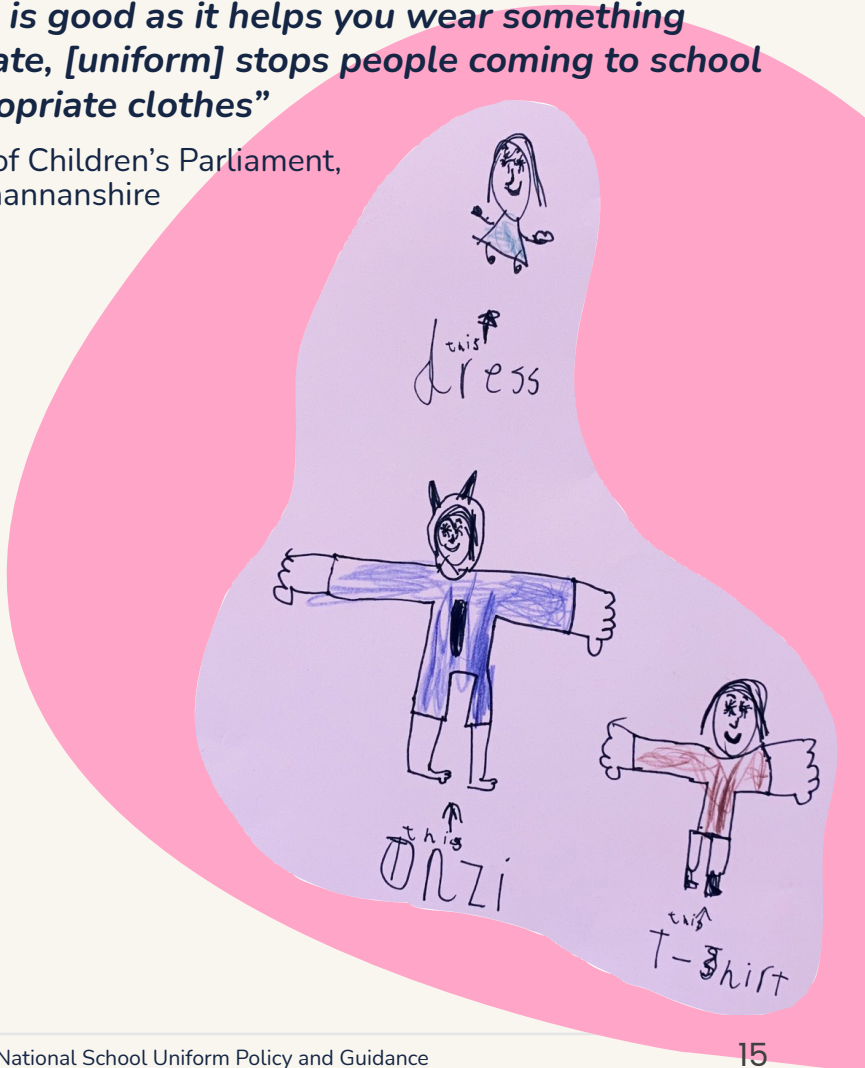
“Uniform is good because you don’t have to wear your own clothes and you are all the same”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Other children equated uniform with certain adult expectations for dress and conduct:

“Uniform is good as it helps you wear something appropriate, [uniform] stops people coming to school in inappropriate clothes”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire



CHOICE

“People feel they don’t have a choice in school uniform”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

When asked the question: Who would like uniform to be different? The overall sentiment from children from across the age ranges was that they would like to see a change in uniform to something different and in the case of the majority of the older children, they would like to see no uniform.

Younger children associated a choice of uniform with comfort or feeling safe at school and they spoke of the type of material they would like to be used, suggesting material similar to their pyjamas or own clothes:

“I want it [uniform] to be really soft on the inside”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

The older children associated choice of school clothes with self-expression, with some wanting to get rid of uniform completely

“I don’t think school uniform should be allowed as we as kids should start exploring our personalities, but we can’t if we wear uniform”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Alternatively, there were children who spoke of having a choice of the style of uniform, with the option of hoodies being cited by children who saw them as comfortable and more in keeping with their own clothes. Some of the children also associated wearing a hoody with being part of a sports teams as some of them were allowed to wear the school football team hoody as uniform.

“We need more hoodies.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Throughout the consultation, a predominant call from the children when talking about choice was colour. They wanted a choice of what colour they wore to school, some liked the “old” colour before the uniform was changed and others wanted to wear their house colours. Some of the children felt that the colour that the school had chosen for their uniform was unfair as the children had not been consulted on the colour. Thus, reiterating the theme of choice regarding uniform and taking children’s views seriously.

“I would wear blue but everyone else would wear their favourite colour to make them feel good”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

“Uniform is too plain, and I think that you should make it more colourful!”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

“I love green t-shirts because it’s my house colour”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Being allowed to wear different clothes for different activities was a common topic. For example, the P2 children said they were allowed to wear whatever they wanted to wear for outdoor play. Some of the children would like the choice to wear their own clothes occasionally as it would make them feel good. This echoes the P6 children talking about the sense of choice they felt when being allowed to wear their football hoody for school.

“I have Pokémon clothes and if I wore them, people would look at them and say ‘that’s cool!’”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

Other children spoke about wanting to accessorise their uniforms to make them feel more relevant to them and to express themselves.

“I want a cat badge, I love cats.”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen



SAFETY

Issues surrounding safety were raised by the children. Some felt that uniform offered an element of protection, echoing adult arguments for uniform:

“If you go on a school trip and you don’t have a uniform you could get lost”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Younger children felt that their badge reiterated their identity and connection to the school:

“The badge helps because I can see how to spell [the school’s name]”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

However, older children associated their uniform with potentially identifying them with negative associations for their personal safety:

“I think you should not wear uniform because it will say your school and anyone could find you every day”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh



CONSEQUENCES

“If you don’t wear it, the school office might shout at you”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

The children’s school uniform expectations varied across the schools we worked in. However they did share a commonality of views of over what would happen if they did not wear the correct or appropriate uniform. Children were wary of the impact of being told off for not wearing uniform on their feelings:

“I’d feel angry if I got in trouble”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P2, Aberdeen

“You’ll get in trouble which makes us sad”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Other children held the view that persistent non-wearing of uniform would lead to further consequences:

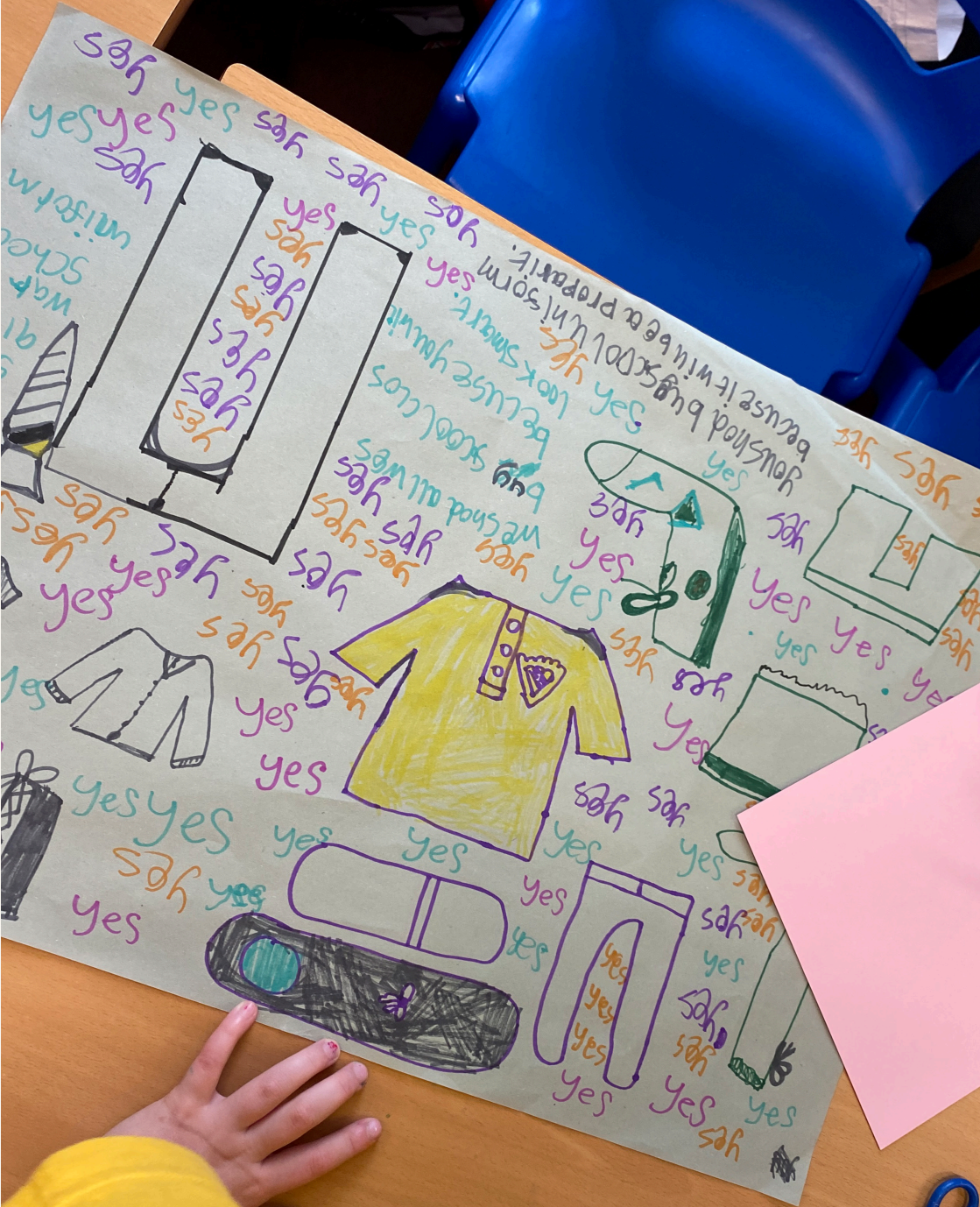
“We don’t really get in trouble if we don’t wear a jumper but if it happens a lot we might”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Some children expressed a feeling of helplessness if they were unable to wear uniform as a result of something out of their control:

“If I haven’t done something wrong, you can’t miss school if it’s [uniform] in the wash”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire



YES!

GENDER

“Children should wear the same clothes, regardless of gender”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Gender bias and uniform was a predominant theme throughout the consultation, with both boys and girls acknowledging uniform posed concerns for them, affecting how they learn and play.

The impact of uniform on play has been raised in previous Children’s Parliament consultations, with one of the Calls to Action from the [Gender Equality in Education and Learning report](#)² being to remove gendered uniforms and sports kits to allow for more inclusive play.

The impact of uniform on both boys and girls on their ability to play and learn was raised during this consultation, with some girls feeling they may not have the same opportunities as the boys to take part in a number of physical activities as they would not be able to change into their P.E. kit as easily. There was also the view from some of the girls that the boys faced similar pressures from their uniform from taking part in physical activities. The gender expectations of their respective uniforms were not conducive to play.

“It’s harder for girls to change into the P.E. kit like [with] their hair, skirt and tights...Boys in trousers might be scared if they do cartwheels, handstands or climb a fence”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P4, Clackmannanshire

Gender expectations of dress for both boys and girls loomed large in the children’s conversations and how current uniform places pressure on them to look a certain way for fear of being bullied or made fun of by their peers:

“My brother won’t wear certain trousers to school that are stretchy at the top because they will make fun of him for wearing leggings”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

“Boys get made fun of it they don’t wear something written on them that’s not Nike. They get called ‘gay’ and names”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

The older girls expressed feelings of anxiety and body consciousness when thinking about the current uniform they had to wear:

“It [uniform] might make you feel ugly”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

“It may be a girl thing, but the top is see-through”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

“A girl in school told me she doesn’t wear shorts because boys make fun of her thighs for being fat or legs being hairy”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, Aberdeen

As aforementioned some of the boys felt it was unfair that the girls were allowed to wear leggings but the boys could not wear joggers in school – which offer a similar level of comfort in learning and play.

Notions of uniform being less gendered ran through the children’s views on uniform.

Key Messages

The key messages to emerge from the consultation with children on school uniform in primary schools were:

- **Cost** - Children recognise the financial pressures some families are facing and the need to keep the cost down. Uniform should be offered at a set price for families and discounts should be offered.
- **Something different** - While there were mixed feelings about what a “uniform” might look like, the majority of children involved in the consultation would like to see something different. Children wanted their clothes to be fun, affordable, fair, colourful, comfortable, practical and personal.
- **Self expression** - As they got older, the children felt that having to wear a uniform limited their opportunities to express their identities. Some of the younger children appreciated the value of wearing a uniform to feel part of a community.
- **Comfort** - Regardless of age, the children all spoke about the lack of comfort in their present uniform, they felt that their uniform was restrictive, especially during and after periods of activity and that it could limit their ability to learn. Easy to wear clothes for younger children were popular, as items such as sweatshirts, tights and shirts with buttons can hinder independence and confidence.
- **Choice** - Children wanted to have a choice in what to wear to school and welcomed the opportunity to personalise their uniform.
- **Safety** - The children identified that uniform would be useful for safety purposes, echoing adult views that uniform would stop children getting lost on school trips.
- **Gender expectations** - Remove gendered uniform requirements.
- **No negative consequences for not wearing uniform** - As it may not be the child’s fault, they are unable to wear their uniform to school.

“Make the uniform comfortable, cheap, not itchy and especially make it cooler”

- Member of Children’s Parliament, P6, Edinburgh

Thanks

We would like to say a huge thank you to all of the children who were involved in this consultation. Children's Parliament spoke to over 100 children across Scotland to find out their views on school uniform. Their opinions and thoughts have been invaluable. Children's Parliament will share this report with the participating schools and children and look forward to feeding back the Scottish Government's response to the children.

A massive thank you to all the staff from Bruntsfield Primary School, St Serf's Primary School and Stoneywood

Primary School for welcoming us into their school and taking part in our activities. We would also like to thank the children involved in our Gender Equality report for their contributions to the questions surrounding uniform, gender and inclusion.

This consultation would not have been possible without the support of Scottish Government. We would like to thank them for their help throughout this project.

About Children's Parliament

Established in 1996, Children's Parliament is Scotland's centre of excellence for children's human rights, participation and engagement. Through our rights-based, creative practice, we provide younger children from diverse backgrounds across Scotland with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and in the community. Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire great awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland.



