

Debate!

Do uniforms make schools better?

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Every term my son has a uniform-free day at his secondary school, when pupils are encouraged to donate money to charity for the 'privilege' of being allowed to wear their own clothes. Recently he admitted he actually prefers to wear a school uniform, because it's easier and there's no pressure to keep up with the latest fashions. I was surprised, particularly when for seven years he went to our local primary school which has no uniform.



DAN BANNISTER—GETTY IMAGES

Most schools in England do have a uniform or dress code. Yet in many European and most American schools, children are not required to wear a uniform. Some experts claim students perform better and become more successful at school and that there are less problems with bullying. Others claim there's no definitive evidence, that wearing one makes a difference to behaviour or academic success. As my son has experience of both options, I asked him to explain what it was like not having a uniform at primary school:

"When you're younger you feel more comfortable in your own clothes. We wore trainers so it was easier to run about in the playground. It was nice that we didn't all look the same and it was easier to find your own clothes if they weren't labelled!"

Loss of individuality is often cited, as a reason not to have a school uniform and I'm not keen on seeing young children dressed identically. My daughter goes to the same uniform-free primary school that my son attended and I like to see the vibrant colours and patterns, the pretty dresses in summer, the fun tights and trainers in winter.

So am I advocating that we abandon school uniforms in favour of jeans and hoodies? No, not really, or at least not at secondary school. A uniform can instil a sense of pride and identity in the school and ensures that all pupils are on the same level, regardless of race or background. There is probably less bullying about wearing the latest trends too, although the fashion conscious usually find ways to customise their uniform. On the other hand, rivalry between secondary schools is common and pupils are easily identified by their uniform.

In my experience, uniform-free is a lot more expensive. Now that my son wears a uniform his weekend clothes last longer, he doesn't need as many and most uniform items can be bought cheaply at supermarkets and they take a lot of wear and tear.

I would prefer a more casual approach to the school uniform. To me, there is something unnatural about children wearing a jacket and tie. Instead a polo-style top (and sweater in winter) with trousers/skirt, in the school's chosen colours, would be more comfortable, cheaper and cooler in warm weather. However, I suspect it's a debate that will continue to get parents, pupils and teachers hot under the collar for many years to come!

► **What do you think? Should Swedish schools start with school uniforms? Would you wear it? Motivate your answer! Also, list at least 5 pros and cons about wearing school uniforms.**