



NORTHERN IRELAND YOUTH ASSEMBLY

Young Peoples' Views on
Wearing Trousers in School
January 2026



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Background

The Youth Assembly was established in June 2021. The current 90 Youth Assembly Members took their seats in November 2025. At the time of recruitment, they were in school years 9-12 which is approximately age 12-16. They are a diverse group. Membership includes young people from every constituency and recruitment was designed to ensure proportionate representation of Section 75 categories such as gender, religious background, race, care experience, sexuality, disability, and young people with caring responsibilities.

The Youth Assembly was established to perform three functions:

- To engage with the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly, specifically with Assembly Committees on legislation and inquiries relevant to young people;
- To undertake project work generated by the three Youth Assembly committees; and
- To enable consultation with government Departments and to participate in youth voice projects.

In January 2026, the Youth Assembly was invited to provide evidence to the Committee for Education on their proposal for a law to allow all pupils to wear trousers at school, so that this becomes a universal right.

Youth Assembly Members met online on 13 January 2026 to consider this proposal and this report summarises their views. Youth Assembly Members will give evidence to the Committee at their meeting on 28 January 2026.

The Youth Assembly wishes to express their thanks to the Committee and its staff for the opportunity to share their views on this issue.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly's engagement on the Committee for Education's proposal for a law to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers in school. The evidence is drawn from a consultation session held on Tuesday 13 January 2026 and incorporates data collected through a Mentimeter quiz, written responses, Microsoft Teams chat contributions, verbal discussion, and post-meeting email submissions. A total of 48 current Youth Assembly Members and 11 Legacy Youth Assembly Members, both male and female, attended the session.

The findings demonstrate overwhelming support among young people for allowing all pupils the choice to wear trousers at school, with 98% of respondents supporting the proposal. Young people consistently framed this issue not as a minor uniform adjustment, but as a meaningful change connected to their daily wellbeing, dignity, and sense of inclusion which should be implemented without delay.

Five key themes emerged across the evidence:

- **Comfort and wellbeing:** Comfort was the most frequently cited factor in discussions about school uniform. While many pupils reported feeling generally comfortable, 35% of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable or very uncomfortable in their current uniform. Young people described discomfort affecting concentration, sensory regulation, and engagement in school life. Allowing trousers was viewed as a practical way to reduce discomfort.
- **Equality:** Young people questioned why boys are typically permitted to wear trousers while girls are not. This was widely described as unfair and outdated. Members also highlighted inequalities between schools, noting that access to trousers currently depends on the school attended, leading to inconsistent treatment of pupils across Northern Ireland.
- **Dignity and safety:** Issues of period dignity and personal safety featured prominently, with young people suggesting that allowing trousers would help pupils feel safer, less exposed, and more dignified at school. Concerns were also raised about the impact of restrictive uniform policies on transgender and non-binary pupils, pupils with disabilities, and those with religious modesty requirements.
- **Practicality:** Trousers were described as more practical for the Northern Ireland climate, everyday movement, and participation in school activities. Young people emphasised that trousers already exist within most uniform policies and would not undermine standards or school identity.
- **Personal autonomy:** While some schools allow trousers, many young people described stigma associated with wearing them. Participants argued that a clear,

universal policy would help normalise choice, reduce judgement, and ensure that the option is real rather than symbolic.

Financial considerations were discussed, but most young people did not view allowing trousers as financially burdensome. Many felt it would be cost-neutral or potentially cost-saving, particularly by reducing reliance on specialist skirts, tights, and gender-specific items and by 'handing down' uniform within families. Where concerns were raised, they were linked to implementation rather than the principle of choice itself.

Overall, the Youth Assembly evidence shows clear, confident, and consistent support for the proposed change. Young people want uniform policies that reflect modern expectations, promote fairness, protect dignity, and enable pupils to feel comfortable, safe, and included in school.

Young People’s Views on Wearing Trousers in School

Introduction

On Tuesday 13 January 2026, the Youth Assembly met to consider the Committee for Education’s proposal for a law to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers in school. Members worked through the questions from the Education Committee’s online consultation survey, using the session to explore the issue in depth and share their views. A total of 48 current Youth Assembly Members were present for the online discussion, alongside 11 Legacy Youth Assembly Members who attended in a supportive capacity. Of the participants, 30 identified as female, and 29 identified as male. Members could submit responses verbally, in the Microsoft Teams ‘Chat’ function, via a Mentimeter quiz, or after the meeting via email.

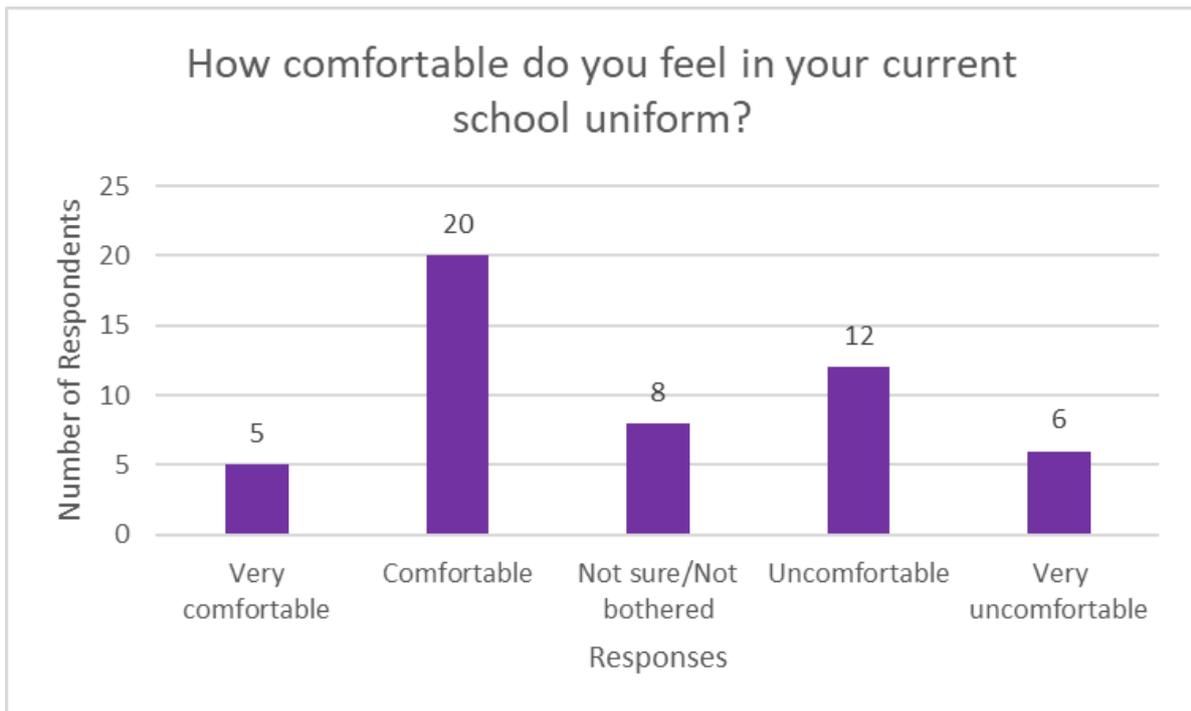
This discussion built on earlier Youth Assembly work, including a Northern Ireland–wide survey conducted by the Youth Assembly Right and Equality Committee in January and February 2025 with 1,137 young people aged 11–18, which examined issues such as sexism, period dignity, safety, and school uniform experiences. A report documenting the Youth Assembly’s previous work on this topic is presented in Appendix One.

Mentimeter Quiz

56 participants engaged with a Mentimeter quiz to record their responses. The quiz was used to support structured discussion, capture anonymous views, and encourage participation from all Members. The majority of questions were drawn directly from the Education Committee’s online consultation survey, ensuring alignment with the Committee’s evidence-gathering process. A small number of additional questions were included to facilitate deeper discussion and reflection during the session. A full copy of the questions posed in the quiz is provided in Appendix Two.

What matters most when it comes to school uniforms?

Question 1 on the quiz asked Members what mattered most when it comes to school uniforms. Members were able to submit multiple responses. Their responses are captured in the Word Cloud below.



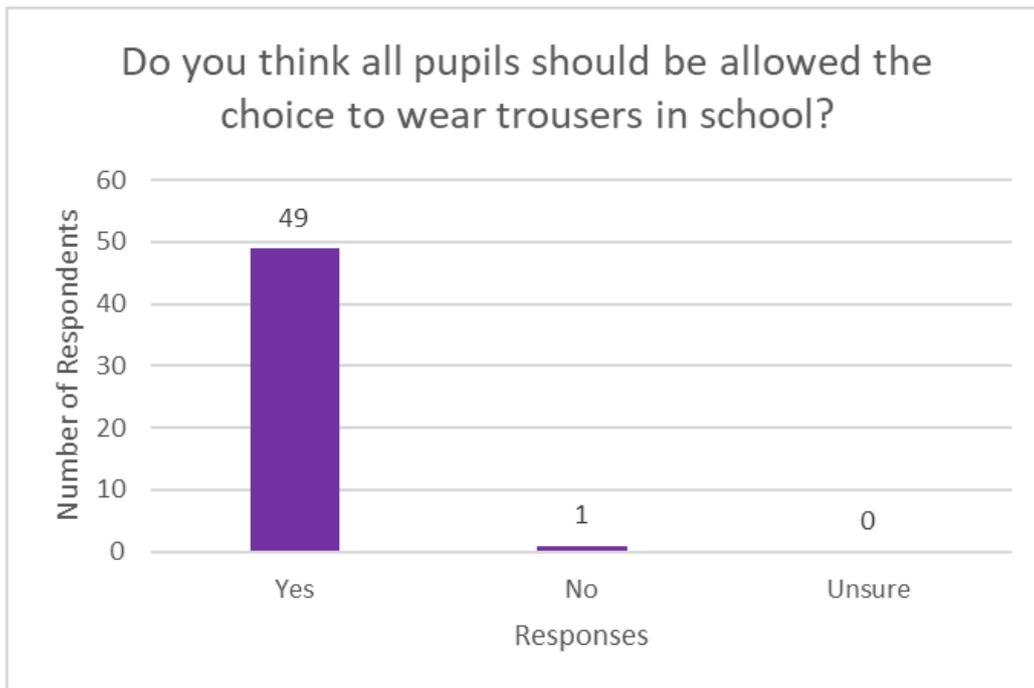
The responses indicate mixed experiences of comfort with current school uniforms. While 39% of respondents described their uniform as comfortable, only 10% felt very comfortable, suggesting that although many pupils are generally at ease, high levels of comfort are less common. At the other end of the scale, a notable proportion reported negative experiences, with 35% of respondents saying they felt either uncomfortable and or very uncomfortable. A further 8 respondents indicated they were not sure or not bothered. Overall, the findings suggest that while many of the Members feel comfortable in their school uniform, a substantial minority experience discomfort, highlighting the importance of considering comfort and practicality in school uniform policies.

Do you think all pupils should be allowed the choice to wear trousers in school?

The next question asked Members to reflect on whether all pupils should be allowed to wear trousers in school. 50 of the young people responded to the question. There were three options to choose from by way of answering the question.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

The results to this question are presented in the bar chart below.



The findings show an overwhelming level of support for allowing all pupils the choice to wear trousers in school. The vast majority of respondents (98%) answered “Yes”, indicating a strong consensus in favour of greater flexibility and choice within school uniform policies. Only one respondent disagreed, and no respondents selected “*Unsure*,” suggesting that views on this issue are both clear and firmly held. The Member who disagreed with the statement did not elaborate on their positioning, and so it is not possible to infer the reasoning behind their response.

When asked why they selected their particular answer, 48 Members provided a written response. Some Members submitted multiple responses. These responses are presented in full in Appendix Three. Through analysis of the open-text responses, five interrelated themes have emerged.

- Comfort and wellbeing
- Equality
- Practicality
- Dignity and safety
- Autonomy

Comfort and Wellbeing

Comfort and wellbeing was the most frequently cited reason why Members felt that all pupils should be allowed the choice to wear trousers in school. Many young people described uniforms as physically uncomfortable and distracting, particularly when they restrict movement or exacerbate existing conditions. One respondent stated that “*young people should not be made to wear clothes they are not comfortable in,*” while another explained that discomfort can directly affect learning: “*people are uncomfortable in their uniforms, so we*

should try and make them feel comfortable in uniform to help focus.” Several responses referenced specific physical experiences, including cramps, sensory sensitivities, and medical conditions, with one young person describing standard uniform as “*EXTREMELY uncomfortable*” and another noting “*sensory issues.*” The cumulative message is that comfort should be considered as foundational to pupils’ ability to engage fully in school life.

Equality

The second reason why Members felt that all pupils should be allowed the choice to wear trousers related to equality. Many young people framed uniform restrictions as outdated and unjust, particularly where boys are permitted to wear trousers but girls are not. Responses continually referenced this perceived inconsistency: “*Equality, if boys are allowed to wear trousers so should girls,*” and “*it’s only fair if boys can wear them.*” Others explicitly challenged gender norms, describing uniform rules as rooted in “*stupid gender stereotypes around girls or women*” and arguing that “*girls should not be second class citizens.*” For some, this issue was firmly located within a broader social context, with one respondent linking choice of uniform to tackling violence against women and girls, and another stating simply, “*we live in the 21st century.*”

Practicality

Practicality, particularly in relation to weather and daily school life, also featured prominently as an issue. Members highlighted the realities of the Northern Ireland climate, with trousers viewed as more suitable for the cold, wind, and rain. One Member noted that “*skirts are impractical and blow in the wind, leaving us cold.*” Others pointed out that trousers better support movement, learning, and outdoor activity, especially across long school days.

Dignity and Safety

A significant number of responses raised issues relating to dignity and safety, particularly for girls. Several young people referred to period dignity, with one stating, “*girls deserve period dignity,*” and others noting discomfort, exposure, and embarrassment. Safety concerns were also raised, including the perception that trousers can reduce unwanted attention or harassment, with one respondent suggesting it could make young women “*less likely to be harassed for their clothing.*” These views echo comments made by young people in the 2025 Youth Assembly Rights and Equality report on Young Women’s Rights in Schools which can be viewed in Appendix One. Religious considerations were also mentioned, with trousers described as more appropriate for pupils whose faith requires modest dress.

Personal Autonomy

Finally, a number of responses emphasised personal autonomy, arguing that allowing choice supports individuality while still maintaining school identity. One respondent captured this balance: “*you can represent school pride whilst also having the option of self-expression.*” Other Members highlighted that choice reflects real-world expectations, noting that “*it*

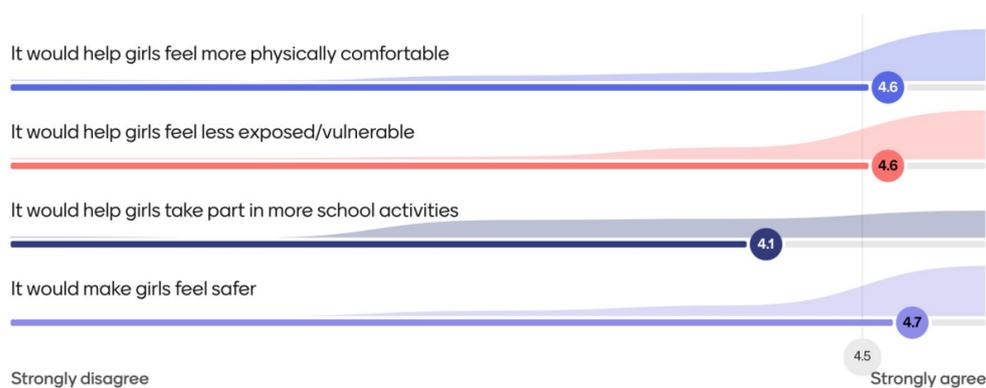
prepares us for the future workplace. We won't be denied trousers then." Even respondents who identified as boys often expressed solidarity, recognising that they do not experience the same constraints but supporting choice nonetheless: *"it shouldn't be up to me because I don't know what it feels like to be a girl."*

Overall, the responses demonstrate that young people view the option to wear trousers not as a minor uniform adjustment, but as a meaningful issue tied to comfort, equality, dignity, inclusion, and respect. The consistency in responses suggests this is an issue on which many young people feel both confident and strongly motivated to see change.

Agreement with a series of statements

The next question asked Members to select responses to eight statements. The responses to the first four statements are presented below.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)



Responses to these statements show a very high level of agreement among the 56 young people surveyed, indicating strong consensus about the perceived benefits of allowing greater flexibility in school uniform policy. Overall, respondents expressed particularly strong agreement that such changes would improve girls' comfort, safety, and sense of vulnerability. The statement "It would help girls feel more physically comfortable" received a mean score of 4.6, suggesting near-unanimous agreement that comfort is a key issue. Similarly, respondents strongly agreed that it would help girls feel "less exposed or vulnerable" (mean 4.6), reinforcing earlier qualitative findings around dignity and protection.

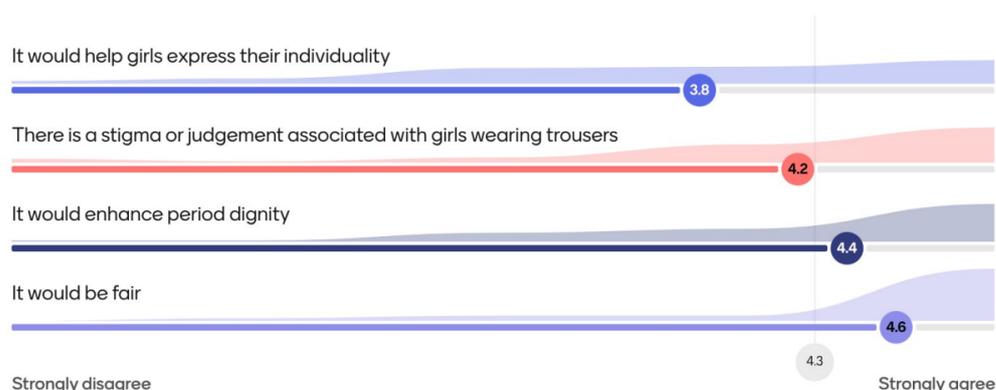
The highest level of agreement was recorded for the statement "It would make girls feel safer," which achieved a mean score of 4.7. This indicates that perceptions of safety are central to young people's views on uniform choice, and that current arrangements may contribute to

feelings of insecurity for some girls. While still strongly positive, the statement “It would help girls take part in more school activities” received a slightly lower, though still high, mean score of 4.1. This suggests that respondents recognise participation benefits, but view comfort, safety, and vulnerability as more immediate and significant impacts.

Taken together, the findings suggest that Members believe that allowing choice around uniform would have tangible, positive effects on girls’ physical comfort, emotional wellbeing, safety, and engagement in school life.

The responses to the first four statements are presented below.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)



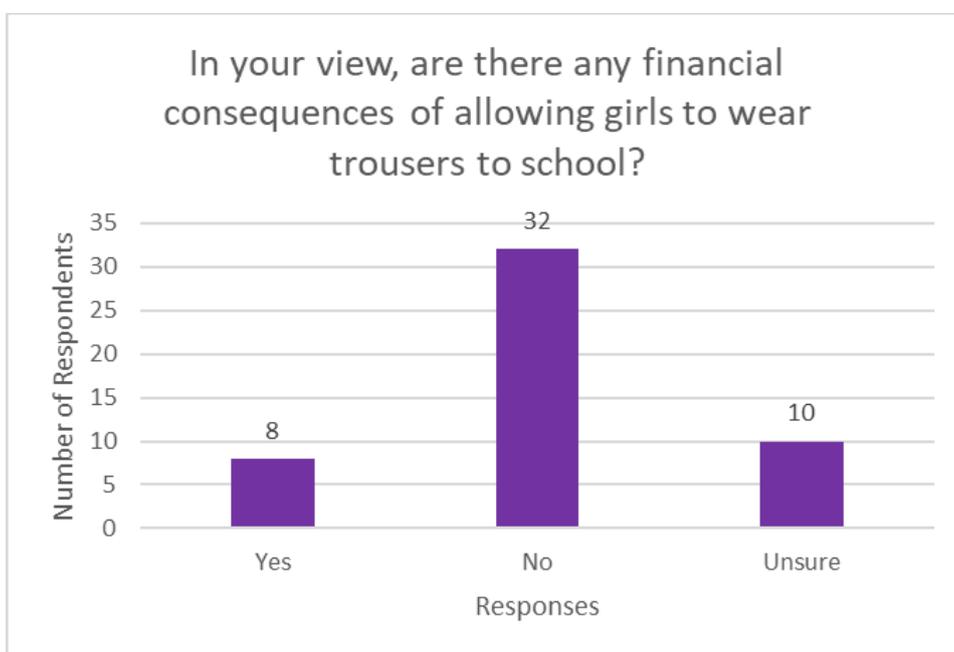
Responses to the second set of statements again demonstrate strong overall agreement among the 56 young people surveyed. The strongest agreement was recorded for the statement “It would be fair,” which received a mean score of 4.6. This indicates that young people overwhelmingly view the option to wear trousers as an issue of fairness, reinforcing the theme of equality highlighted in the previous question. There was also high agreement that allowing trousers would “enhance period dignity,” with a mean score of 4.4. This suggests that respondents clearly recognise the practical and emotional challenges associated with menstruation and view uniform choice as an important factor in supporting girls’ comfort and dignity.

The statement “There is a stigma or judgement associated with girls wearing trousers” received a mean score of 4.2, indicating that many young people perceive social judgement or negative attitudes surrounding girls who diverge from traditional uniform expectations. Agreement was slightly lower, though still positive, for the statement “It would help girls express their individuality,” which received a mean score of 3.8. While self-expression is clearly valued, this suggests that respondents see the primary benefits of uniform choice as rooted more strongly in fairness, dignity, and wellbeing than solely in individual expression.

Taken together, these findings underline that young people associate uniform flexibility with fairness and dignity first and foremost, while also recognising the role of uniform rules in reinforcing stigma and limiting personal expression.

In your view, are there any financial consequences of allowing girls to wear trousers in school?

The next question asked if there were any financial consequences of allowing girls to wear trousers in school. Of the 56 Members accessing the quiz, 50 responded to this question. Responses to the question are captured below.



The responses to this questions should be interpreted alongside the context that many Members expressed confusion about whether the question referred to positive or negative financial consequences. This uncertainty likely influenced how the young people responded. Despite this, the majority of respondents (64%) selected “No,” indicating that most young people do not perceive allowing girls to wear trousers as having any significant financial implications, either positive or negative. A smaller number (16% of respondents) answered “Yes,” suggesting that some felt there could be financial consequences, while 20% respondents selected “Unsure,” likely reflecting ambiguity about the intent of the question rather than a firmly held view.

Members were asked the follow-up question, “why do you say that?” in order to explain their response to the question regarding the financial implication of allowing girls to wear trousers in school. Members were allowed to submit multiple responses, and 47 Members contributed via the Mentimeter quiz. A full breakdown of their responses is documented in Appendix Four.

Overall, the dominant view expressed was that allowing girls to wear trousers would be financially neutral or potentially beneficial, rather than creating additional costs. Many Members indicated that trousers are already a standard part of school uniform for boys, and therefore extending this option to girls would not require families to purchase new or specialist items. Several responses suggested that trousers are often “*already owned*,” “*easier to reuse*,” or “*last longer than skirts*,” implying potential cost savings over time.

Some respondents noted that greater flexibility could reduce pressure on families by allowing them to buy uniform items from a wider range of retailers, rather than being limited to gender-specific or branded options. Others highlighted that trousers may be more practical year-round, reducing the need for additional items such as tights during colder months, which can increase ongoing costs.

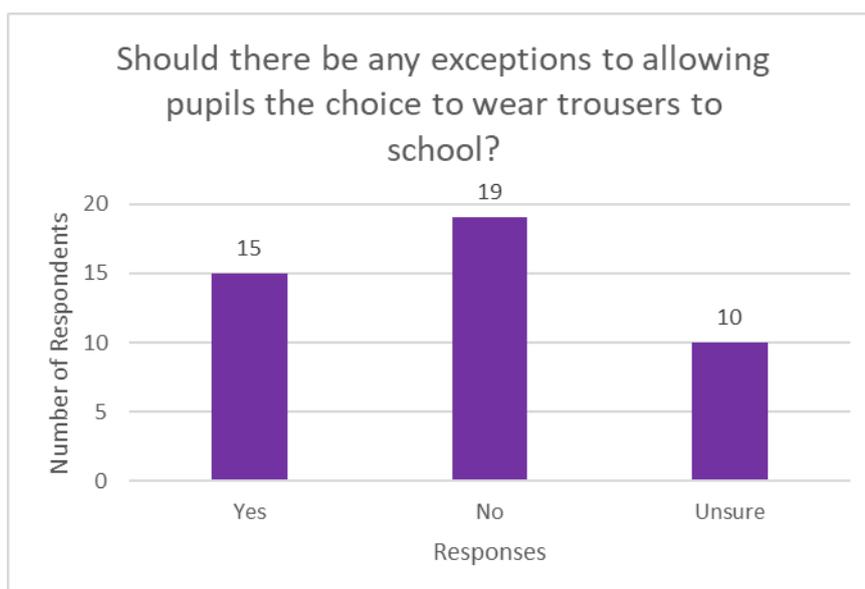
Where Members did identify possible financial implications, these were typically framed as context-dependent rather than inherent to the policy change itself. For example, a small number of responses suggested that costs could arise if schools required trousers to be purchased from specific suppliers, or if families felt obliged to buy additional items rather than choosing between existing options. However, these concerns were often accompanied by the view that such costs would be avoidable with sensible, flexible uniform policies.

A further theme running through the responses was the perception that financial considerations should not outweigh wellbeing and equality. Even where costs were mentioned, young people frequently returned to the idea that comfort, dignity, and fairness justified the change regardless of minor financial impacts.

Taken together, the responses indicate that young people largely do not view allowing girls to wear trousers as a financially burdensome change. Instead, many see it as cost-neutral, potentially cost-saving, and highly dependent on how schools implement uniform policies in practice.

Should there be any exceptions to allowing pupils the choice to wear trousers in school?

The next question asked Members if there should be any exceptions to allowing pupils the choice to wear trousers in school. Of the 56 Members accessing the Mentimeter quiz, 44 submitted a response. A breakdown of the responses is presented in the bar graph below.



Before responding to this question, a number of Members expressed uncertainty about its wording. In particular, young people were unsure about what constituted an exception. Several Members indicated that this lack of clarity made it difficult to select the response that best reflected their views, and this confusion is likely to have influenced the distribution of responses. That being said, responses to this question indicate mixed views among young people on whether any exceptions should apply to allowing pupils the choice to wear trousers to school. Of those who responded, the largest group (43% of respondents) selected “No,” suggesting that many young people favour a universal approach with no exceptions.

A further 34% of respondents felt that there should be exceptions, and 23% of respondents were unsure, indicating some uncertainty about how such a policy should be applied in practice. This spread of responses suggests that, while there is strong overall support for choice, young people are less settled on whether that choice should be absolute or subject to specific conditions.

Members were invited to reflect on why they selected their particular response. The open-text responses provide helpful insight into how young people understood the idea of exceptions, and what they felt those exceptions should (or should not) look like in practice. As with previous questions, Members were able to submit more than one response. All responses are presented in Appendix Five.

Among those who felt exceptions should exist, the most common reasoning related to specific contexts rather than specific groups of pupils. Some young people suggested that exceptions might be appropriate for particular activities or settings, such as PE, practical subjects, or formal occasions, where uniform requirements may already differ. These responses tended to emphasise practicality and safety rather than restricting choice based on gender or identity. A smaller number of responses referred to school ethos or uniform standards, suggesting that any trousers worn should still align with agreed expectations around appearance (for example,

being smart, appropriate, or part of the official uniform). Importantly, these comments generally did not oppose the principle of choice itself but rather reflected a desire for clarity and consistency in how policies are implemented.

Those who responded that there should be no exceptions were often explicit that introducing exceptions risked undermining fairness and equality. Several responses emphasised that choice should apply equally to all pupils, without additional conditions, arguing that any exceptions could reintroduce unequal treatment or confusion. This group tended to view uniform choice as a rights-based issue, where consistency was seen as essential to avoiding discrimination.

Members who were unsure frequently acknowledged the complexity of the issue. Their responses often reflected an awareness that schools operate in diverse contexts and may face practical constraints, but without strong views on what exceptions should look like. This uncertainty suggests that while young people are confident about the principle of choice, they recognise that implementation details require careful consideration.

Overall, the qualitative responses indicate that young people are less concerned with restricting who can wear trousers, and more focused on how policies are applied fairly and sensibly. Where exceptions are supported, they are typically framed as limited, contextual, and practical, rather than value-based or exclusionary.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

The final question invited Members to share any additional thoughts on the proposal to introduce a Bill allowing all pupils the choice to wear trousers. All of the responses to this question are presented in Appendix Six.

A number of participants expressed frustration that the issue is still being debated at all, framing it as a straightforward matter of equality: “*Why is this even a debate, for equality why not?*” and another commented, “*It’s not the 1900s so let us be us.*” These responses reflect a perception that current uniform restrictions are outdated and out of step with contemporary social values. This was echoed by another respondent who stated, “*We live in a progressive society. Why not change?*”

Several participants returned to the theme of stigma, particularly around girls who do not conform to traditional uniform expectations. One Member noted that “*there is a stigma around it so allowing it would dismantle the stigma,*” while another shared that girls are already subject to judgement and harassment under current rules: “*Girls sometimes get harassed or talked about for their current uniform.*” Issues of gender identity and inclusion were also raised. One respondent highlighted how rigid uniform rules can intensify scrutiny of gender expression, describing a friend who “*identifies as a girl*” but was repeatedly questioned about her gender

and bathroom use, adding that *“she could’ve avoided this with trousers.”* Another participant noted concerns that *“Catholic schools may not like trans people wearing skirts,”* pointing to the need for policies that protect pupils across different school contexts.

Practical considerations continued to feature strongly. Participants reiterated that trousers are often better suited to the realities of school life, particularly in colder weather or during active learning. As one Member stated, *“Trousers are often practical for school life especially in cold weather, during physical activity or while sitting on the floor.”* Others linked comfort directly to educational outcomes, with one respondent commenting, *“Studies show that greater comfort actually helps pupils focus better on learning and have improved concentration.”*

Some participants also placed the issue in a wider European and international context, noting that uniform practices are not universal. One response observed, *“We are one of only 3 countries in Europe who have a school uniform in most schools.”* These comments suggest that young people are aware of alternative models and question the necessity of restrictive uniform policies.

Finally, a small number of responses reflected frustration with the survey itself, with several participants stating that *“the questions were hard to understand”* or *“very poorly worded.”*

Microsoft Teams ‘Chat’ Function Responses

The discussion in the Microsoft Teams chat added further depth and nuance to the survey findings, with young people using the space to share lived experiences of school uniform rules and their real-world consequences. Collectively, these comments reinforce earlier themes around cost, comfort, dignity, equality, sustainability, and stigma, while also illustrating how uniform policies operate unevenly across schools.

A strong theme to emerge was practical comfort, particularly in relation to weather and movement. Several girls highlighted how skirts and tights are poorly suited to winter conditions, with one explaining that *“girls wearing skirts and tights in wintertime we can get really cold.”* Comfort was also linked to safety and mobility, including a striking account of a first-year pupil who *“tripped down the stairs because of the lack of movement [in a skirt] and ended up breaking her leg.”*

Cost and financial inequality featured prominently. Many Members described girls’ uniforms as significantly more expensive than boys’, both upfront and over time. One Member contrasted a *“bottle green”* skirt costing *“£40 if not more”* with boys’ black trousers that can be bought *“in supermarkets”* for *“around £20 cheaper.”* Another summarised the issue: *“girls uniform is more expensive because of girls shoes, tights, socks, option of a scarf and skirts.”* Tights were repeatedly cited as an ongoing expense, with one participant noting they *“have to be*

continually replaced throughout the year.” These costs were seen as particularly challenging for families facing financial difficulty or those without older siblings to provide hand-me-downs.

Linked to this was frustration with overly specific and inconsistent uniform requirements. Participants described skirts with “*over 12 box pleats*” that are “*highly inconvenient for ironing,*” schools that mandate “*a whole new skirt for 3rd into 4th year,*” and rules where an inch above the knee requires “*a whole new skirt at around £40.*” By contrast, trousers were seen as more standardised and flexible: “*skirts have so many different designs from school to school whereas trousers seem to be standardised.*”

A small number of young people raised environmental concerns, particularly around tights. One commented that “*tights are also bad for the environment... they take like 40 years to decompose and personally I go through so many a year.*” Another argued that allowing plain trousers that can be bought anywhere would reduce waste and cost, suggesting uniforms should be “*plain black, grey etc. just in order to keep pricing down.*”

The chat also illustrated the role of stigma and social judgement. Even in schools where trousers are technically permitted, young people described strong cultural barriers. One participant explained that while most girls supported the option, “*no one would want to be the first to wear trousers... they feel that they might be judged.*” Another shared a personal anecdote of overhearing a relative say, “*why are your friends so weird? it’s weird for her to be wearing trousers.*”

Concerns about gender identity and inclusion were raised. One young person described “*a trans male person and non-binary person in my class ... and the amount of judgement they have received ... has been horrendous.*” Others pointed out that rigid skirt requirements can conflict with religious beliefs, disabilities, or practical needs, such as using crutches or a wheelchair, where trousers are “*easier to sit comfortably*” and move safely.

Across the discussion, young people returned to the principle of choice and equality. Several argued that if the purpose of uniform is equality, then allowing trousers should not depend on the school you attend: “*it’s not fair to have the choice of trousers differ from one school to the next.*” Others rejected arguments about boys wearing skirts as a distraction, with one stating, “*it’s not a sincere worry... I would like to know the genuine reason that the Minister objects.*” As another participant summarised, “*let the children wear what they want, a skirt isn’t a girls-only piece of clothing the same way trousers aren’t boys-only.*”

Some comments questioned the role of uniform altogether. One participant argued that “*if school really is preparing people for the ‘real’ world then there should be no uniform,*” while another advocated for PE kit as a permanent uniform because it is “*warmer, more comfortable,*” and allows for layering. International comparisons were also raised, with one young person describing cheaper, more flexible uniforms used in Canada.

Taken together, the Teams chat comments show how uniform rules intersect with daily comfort, family finances, environmental sustainability, gender identity, and social pressure. They also demonstrate that even where policy technically allows choice, cultural stigma and inconsistent implementation can prevent that choice from being exercised in practice.

Verbal Contributions

The verbal contributions during the meeting reinforced and expanded upon the themes identified in the written responses, with young people speaking candidly about stigma, comfort, and the purpose of school uniform. Several participants returned to the issue of cost and affordability, especially in relation to gendered uniform requirements. One young person explained that *“passing down trousers from brother to sister will be a lot cheaper than having to buy skirts for girls and trousers for boys,”* highlighting how current rules can unnecessarily increase costs for families. Others pointed to the way uniform pricing is shaped by design choices rather than necessity, noting that skirt prices can depend on *“how many pleats are in it.”* Another participant described the repeated cost of replacement skirts, explaining that *“the zip of my skirt breaks a lot, so my parents have to pay for replacement skirts... which they wouldn’t have to spend on trousers.”* Linked to this was frustration with restricted purchasing options. One young person described having to go to *“a certain shop”* to buy uniform trousers, while another observed from conversations with shop staff that *“it would be cheaper for them to just sell trousers,”* but that schools effectively force retailers to stock gender-specific items.

The discussion also highlighted the emotional and social cost of stigma, even in schools where trousers are technically permitted. One participant described considering wearing trousers after their school introduced the option, but explained that when they told their friends, *“they kind of just went all quiet,”* adding that *“the girls who wear trousers are judged for doing it.”* Another noted that in their school, *“less than 10 people wear trousers,”* and that those who do are seen as *“weird”* or assumed to *“have a problem with skirts.”* Several young people reflected that if a pupil wore trousers for the first time, *“they’d feel like everyone had their eyes on them.”* In this context, participants argued that legislation could play a role in normalising choice, with one stating that *“a law making schools allow trousers... would remove so much of the stigma around it.”*

Concerns about comfort, dignity, and sensory needs were also raised. One participant explained how uniform can be physically distressing, sharing that being autistic meant their uniform caused *“a lot of sensory issues throughout the day.”* Another described how rigid shirt requirements did not suit their body, noting that doing up the top buttons was *“pretty much impossible,”* and although adjustments had been allowed, they *“didn’t like really being different.”* This led to suggestions for more flexible alternatives, such as polo shirts, which were seen as maintaining a sense of uniform while allowing dignity and comfort.

Girls from all-girls schools spoke about constant policing of skirt length and the impact this has on wellbeing and cost. One participant explained that skirts must sit exactly at the knee, but that this leads to ridicule if they are too long and punishment if they are too short, often resulting in being told to “*buy a new skirt,*” which “*just adds on to the cost.*” They argued that trousers would “*eradicate that problem*” entirely.

Some participants questioned the purpose of school uniform more broadly, noting inconsistencies between expectations placed on pupils and the freedoms afforded to adults. One young person asked why pupils are restricted when “*adults have free choice of what they want to wear,*” adding that if school is “*preparing you for life,*” then uniform policies should reflect that reality. Another pointed out the perceived double standard that “*female teachers get to wear trousers and don’t get ridiculed for it,*” asking why pupils are treated differently.

Finally, several contributions emphasised choice as a principle of equality and community. One participant summarised this clearly: “*we’re all members of the same community so it should be that everyone has the choice.*” Others stressed that the issue is not about forcing anyone to wear trousers but about ensuring that those who want to are not prevented “*for no particular reason other than the school doesn’t deem it fit.*”

Taken together, the verbal contributions provide compelling, first-hand insight into how uniform policies affect young people socially, financially, and emotionally. They underline that even where choice exists in theory, stigma, cost, and inconsistent implementation can significantly limit its impact. Participants repeatedly returned to the view that a clear, consistent policy would not only reduce inequality and cost but also remove judgement and allow young people to feel more comfortable and included in their school communities.

Post-Consultation Email Submissions

Two written submissions were received by email following the meeting, each adding further reflection and reinforcing key themes already raised by participants. A copy of these submissions is presented in Appendix Seven.

The first email submission set out a clear, structured case in favour of allowing trousers, arguing that current skirt requirements can “*enforce outdated gender stereotypes*” and that trousers are “*more practical for sports and the North’s common cold weather,*” with benefits for comfort and concentration in school. The Member highlighted the importance of religious inclusion, noting that trousers can better support modesty requirements, and gender identity, stating that skirts can negatively affect “*a transgender or non-binary student’s ability to feel safe and affirmed in their identity.*” The submission further framed gendered uniform policies as a potential equality issue, suggesting that giving girls fewer clothing options could be viewed as “*sex discrimination*” and therefore inconsistent with equality legislation.

This submission included an account shared by a parent, describing a daughter who wears trousers due to “*sensory issues*” and “*gets bullied for being different.*” Crucially, the parent believed that if trousers were a genuine personal choice for all pupils, “*more people would wear them and thus the bullying would no longer be an issue.*” This reinforces the recurring theme that stigma is often driven not by the clothing itself, but by how uncommon or exceptional it is made to appear.

The second email submission focused explicitly on fear of standing out and the social risks of being perceived as different. Drawing on personal experience, the contributor explained that people who dress “*out of the norm*” in their local area are often mocked and described being “*ridiculed and laughed at by older years*” after dyeing their hair with pink highlights. They argued that similar dynamics would apply in school settings, where pupils may be “*scared to be different*” if they are treated negatively for deviating from expected norms.

Conclusion

The evidence gathered through the Youth Assembly’s discussion indicates clear and consistent support for the Committee for Education’s proposal for a law to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers in school. Across the Mentimeter responses, written comments, Microsoft Teams chat contributions, verbal discussion, and post-meeting emails, Members repeatedly framed the issue as one of comfort, equality, practicality, dignity, safety, and personal autonomy.

While experiences of comfort in current uniforms were mixed, the prominence of “*comfort*” and “*equality*” as the two most important factors for Members underscores the significance of this issue in young people’s daily school experience. Support for trouser choice was almost unanimous among those who responded, and the open-text responses demonstrate that young people do not view this as a minor policy adjustment, but as a meaningful change linked to wellbeing, participation, inclusion, and respect.

Members also expressed strong agreement that allowing trousers would benefit girls, improving comfort, safety, and period dignity. Many recognised that stigma and judgement can currently prevent pupils from exercising choice, even where trousers are technically permitted. Although some Members expressed uncertainty regarding financial implications and possible exceptions, the dominant view was that allowing trousers is likely to be cost-neutral or cost-saving, with any potential costs largely dependent on implementation. Where exceptions were discussed, young people tended to emphasise fair and consistent application over restricting choice.

Taken together, the Youth Assembly findings suggest that young people want uniform policies that reflect modern expectations, promote equality, and support pupils to feel comfortable, safe, and included in school.

Appendices

Appendix One - Young Women's rights in Schools: Insights from the Youth Assembly Report 2025

In January 2025, the Youth Assembly's Rights and Equality Committee launched a Northern Ireland-wide survey through CitizenSpace. Working in partnership with youth organisations and post-primary schools, the committee gathered the views of 1,137 young people aged 11–18. The survey explored a range of issues connected to young women's rights in school, including sexism, period dignity, safety, and PE and sports provision. This report presents the findings relating specifically to school uniforms. The full report can be accessed here:

[Committee Reports – Northern Ireland Youth Assembly](#)

The age profile of respondents, as depicted in Table 1, demonstrates a broad and balanced spread across year groups, with each age contributing meaningfully to the overall picture. The largest groups of respondents were aged 17 (n=211), 14 (n=195), and 16 (n=165), but responses were received across the full age range. Younger participants were also represented, including 27 respondents aged 11. A small number of responses (n=21) came from individuals completing the survey on behalf of a young person aged 11–18, reflecting situations where support was needed to complete the questions.

Age	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
11	27	2.4%
12	116	10.2%
13	138	12.1%
14	195	17.15%
15	156	13.7%
16	165	14.5%
17	211	18.6%
18	108	9.5%
Responding on behalf of a young person aged 11-18	21	1.9%

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents to the Youth Assembly Rights and Equality Survey.

Alongside age, respondents were also asked to indicate their gender. As shown in Table 2, the majority of participants identified as female (n=771), with 29.1% (n=331) identifying as male. A smaller proportion (n=35) selected 'prefer not to say', reflecting the importance of allowing young people the choice to respond in a way that feels most comfortable to them. The gender distribution of respondents is presented in Table 2.

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Female	771	67.8%
Male	331	29.1%
Prefer not to say	35	3.1%

Table 2: Gender distribution of respondents to the Youth Assembly Rights and Equality Survey.

Respondents were also asked whether girls in their school currently had the option of wearing trousers as part of the uniform. The results show a fairly even split between those who reported that trousers are permitted (n=412) and those who said they are not (n=390). A significant proportion (n=264) indicated that they were unsure, suggesting that uniform policies may not always be clearly communicated or consistently implemented. A smaller group (n=71) selected “not relevant.”

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	412	36.2%
No	390	34.3%
Don't know	264	23.2%
Not relevant	71	6.2%

Table 3: Respondents' understanding on whether girls can wear trousers as part of their school uniform.

Respondents were asked whether they believed that girls feel comfortable in their current school uniforms. The responses show a mixed picture, with relatively few young people expressing confidence that girls are fully comfortable. 20.1% of respondents (n=229) felt that girls are comfortable in their uniforms, while the largest proportion (n=426) felt girls are comfortable ‘to some extent’, suggesting that many see the issue as nuanced or context specific.

Notably, almost one quarter (n=283) of respondents believed that girls do not feel comfortable in their school uniforms. A further 17.6% (n=199) of young people selected ‘don't know’. These responses are presented in Table 4.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	229	20.1%
To some extent	426	37.5%
No	283	24.9%
Don't know	199	17.6%

Table 4: Respondents' views on whether girls feel comfortable in their school uniforms.

Participants were asked whether they thought girls felt comfortable in their PE kits. The responses again suggest varying experiences across schools. While approximately a third of respondents (n=397) believe that girls do feel comfortable, a considerable proportion (n=328) felt this was only true ‘to some extent’. Notably, 16% (n=182) answered ‘No’, indicating that a

substantial minority perceive discomfort among girls during PE. A further 17.6% (n=200) selected ‘Don’t know’, reflecting uncertainty or limited visibility of others’ experiences, and 2.6% of respondents indicated that the question was ‘Not relevant’ to them. These responses are captured in Table 5.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	397	34.9%
To some extent	328	28.9%
No	182	16%
Don’t know	200	17.6%
Not relevant	30	2.6%

Table 5: Respondents’ views on whether girls feel comfortable in their PE kits.

Respondents were also asked whether they believed that school uniforms should be gender neutral. Almost half of the survey respondents (n=517, 45.5%) stated that uniforms should be gender neutral, reflecting a growing desire among young people for options that accommodate comfort, identity, and personal expression. Just over a quarter (n=286, 25.2%) felt that uniforms should not be gender neutral, while 29.4% (n=334) selected the answer, ‘Don’t know.’

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Yes	517	45.5%
No	286	25.2%
Don’t know	334	29.4%

Table 6: Respondents’ views on whether school uniforms should be gender neutral.

The survey then invited respondents to share any further comments they had regarding school uniforms. The volume and tone of responses underline how strongly the survey participants feel about these issues. One of the key themes which emerged was in relation to the physical discomfort experienced by young women through wearing their school uniform. Over 80 responses referred to itchy tights, heavy or scratchy fabrics, and skirts that are ill-fitted.

“Our school uniform is extremely uncomfortable and often restricts the amount of attention you can give to things that matter, such as lessons. They are not suitable for all weather types, despite adjustments such as socks or short-sleeved shirts. They’re also very expensive.”

“The tights are way too uncomfortable, and we are forced to wear them all year round, even in summer.”

Several respondents also mentioned being unable to remove their blazers or school jumpers in the summer because their white school shirts were “see-through.”

“Almost all brands that make school shirts in an affordable price range are see-through... Many girls won’t take off their blazers even when they’re too warm.”

School skirts were also mentioned frequently, with respondents criticising how they fit, how they feel, and how they are monitored. Skirts were described as poorly designed, and multiple respondents felt that they were too short.

“The skirts we are forced to wear in my school are rather short. Myself and many others feel rather uncomfortable in these skirts. They ride up a lot and become even shorter. This makes me feel self conscious and sexualised.”

Other respondents expressed frustration that rules regarding skirt length were often framed in sexualised terms.

“Girls are told that their skirt length makes male staff uncomfortable, which it shouldn’t, because we are young girls.”

“There’s a focus on skirt length within school, which I think promotes the idea that girls are responsible for how men perceive them/how they are sexualised.”

Closely linked to the topic of skirt length were concerns about safety, upskirting, and sexual harassment. A significant number of respondents gave specific examples of times when young men in their school had looked up skirts, taken photos, or made sexual comments about the skirts their female peers were wearing. Survey responses regularly highlighted that school uniform policies did little to protect the young women in school and often seemed to instead shift responsibility onto the girls themselves.

“We have to wear tights all year round because boys might upskirt us walking up steps or in classrooms. Why is it on us to wear the tights and not on the boys to be taught not to be inappropriate?”

An incredibly common suggestion was for the option of trousers to be offered as an alternative to skirts, without stigma, bureaucracy, or special permissions required. Many respondents felt that trousers should be an ordinary and available option, rather than something that young women had to earn through medical notes, meetings with the school leadership team, or gender identity disclosures.

“In my school, there had to be a reason to let the girls wear trousers, whether that be a medical condition or that you had changed your gender identity. Even at that, there had to be a meeting with parents.”

“In order for a girl to wear trousers she must get permission from our principal. I have seen 1 female student wearing trousers in my entire time at the school. I do not wear trousers because I believe I would be bullied.”

There was also strong feedback about PE kits being too short and restrictive, particularly in relation to shorts.

“My P.E kit last year was SO BAD – the skort was tiny and it covered nothing... They’re restricting, uncomfortable, itchy and sexist.”

“The PE skorts are extremely short and tight. It’s not okay.”

Many survey responses described different standards for young men and young women. Respondents said that boys could often wear shorts in hot weather, whereas girls were more likely to be reprimanded for minor uniform violations, like sock length, rolled skirts, and tights.

“There are way more restrictions on what girls can wear. Boys just have to look neat.”

“Boys are far more likely to get away with uniform violations, whereas for girls skirt length has become a huge topic of conversation.”

A smaller number of respondents highlighted sensory needs or disabilities make standard uniforms especially challenging. One student with ASD described uniform as

“always been an issue... sensory wise and it’s never taken into consideration.”

Summary

Overall, the survey findings indicate that young people’s experiences of school uniform in Northern Ireland are complex. The quantitative responses show that many young people believe girls are only “to some extent” comfortable in their uniforms and PE kits. This is supported by the qualitative feedback describing uniforms as physically uncomfortable, poorly designed for girls’ bodies, and often impractical for the weather. Cost and affordability also emerged as recurring concerns, particularly in relation to tights, PE kit and the need to replace items that are easily damaged or do not fit well. The narrative comments further highlight how uniform policies intersect with issues of dignity, safety and sexism. There was strong support for girls being able to choose trousers without stigma, bureaucracy or special permission, and for greater flexibility and choice within PE kit, including longer shorts, leggings and less revealing options.

Appendix Two - Mentimeter Quiz on wearing Trousers in School

Mentimeter

Instructions



Mentimeter

👍 👤

Mentimeter

In one word, what matters most when it comes to school uniforms?

Mentimeter

👍 👤

How comfortable do you feel in your current school uniform?



Do you think all pupils should be allowed the choice to wear trousers in school?



Why do you say that?



To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

- It would help girls feel more physically comfortable
- It would help girls feel less exposed/vulnerable
- It would help girls take part in more school activities
- It would make girls feel safer
- It would help girls express their individuality
- There is a stigma or judgement associated with girls wearing trousers
- It would enhance period dignity
- It would be fair

10
Strongly disagree

Strongly agree



In your view, are there any financial consequences of allowing girls to wear trousers to school?



Why do you say that?



Should there be any exceptions to allowing pupils the choice to wear trousers to school?



If you said 'yes', what exception(s) should there be?



Is there anything else you'd like to say about the idea of a law to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers in school?



Appendix Three – Should all pupils be allowed the choice to wear trousers? - Open Text Comments from Youth Assembly Members

Do you think all pupils should be allowed the choice to wear trousers in school? Why do you say that?

- *Young people should not be made wear clothes they are not comfortable in.*
- *It doesn't harm anyone if you wear trousers.*
- *Just annoying to wear compared to own clothes.*
- *It's important for modern day gender equality.*
- *Young people should be able to feel comfortable while going to school as it would make school life ultimately better for that person.*
- *I think that people whoever should be able to because it is more comfortable and freeing then skirts and making it more equal in school.*
- *It's just fabric. So often schools dislike female students having uniform for conservatism or Christian ethos, yet it's accepted in wider society.*
- *Equality, if boys are allowed to wear trousers so should girls.*
- *I think it's important that you can represent school pride whilst also having the option of self-expression and if it's comfortable why should it be such a big issue and it doesn't harm anyone.*
- *Because I'm not a girl so they can wear what they like it's not a bad thing to wear it.*
- *People are uncomfortable in their uniforms, so we should try and make them feel comfortable in uniform to help focus.*
- *I believe that every students of any gender should have the choice of trousers or skirts.*
- *Uncomfortable rubbing against stomach when you have cramps.*
- *Everyone should be able to wear what they feel comfortable in and adults can wear trousers so why can't young adults??*
- *Because why should this part of the UK be dragging behind others due to stupid gender stereotypes around girls or women.*
- *Because people should feel comfortable with what they wear in school.*
- *I think we should be allowed as girl can feel more comfortable and get less cold.*
- *So, people can feel comfortable in what they're wearing.*
- *Because everyone should be allowed self-expression. But people taking the mick out of these rules takes away the purpose.*
- *Everyone should be allowed to express themselves and if wearing trousers does that then so be it.*

- *There is no valid reason for people not being able to wear trousers at school especially during situations where pupils are uncomfortable or not equipped to deal with weather.*
- *I feel like I feel this way as I as a boy always wear trousers and mostly all of my friends are girls including my LSA and one of my friends always wear trousers as it's just more comfortable.*
- *Everyone should have a choice.*
- *It promotes equality, comfort and inclusion. It is practical for learning, movement and weather conditions (especially living in Northern Ireland. And it helps to ensure schools don't disadvantage.*
- *People should be able to express themselves and be comfortable in what they wear.*
- *There are no drawbacks to allowing all pupils to wear trousers, it can help people feel more equal and give them more choice.*
- *Girls should be able to feel comfortable in their uniform, in the exam hall we were all freezing in tights and shirt while in a PE kit we were better.*
- *Everyone should have the option and the right to be comfortable and feel safe in their uniform.*
- *I have a condition which makes the standard shirt, tie and blazer, EXTREMELY uncomfortable and also look HORRIFIC compared to how it looks on other pupils.*
- *I feel that in winter months people should be able to wear trousers especially in negative temperatures and in the summertime clothes that are not prone to make you sweat.*
- *We attend school for six hours a day, five days a week from the ages of 4 til 18. If a female student feels more comfortable and confident in trousers, then I see no reason why they shouldn't be all.*
- *Everyone deserves to feel comfortable in their uniform.*
- *I firmly believe that if you attend a school you should be comfortable with rules before joining.*
- *For specific religions where it's not allowed to show skin, trousers would be easier as with skirts you will still be able to see skin which would be against the religion.*
- *Personal autonomy. If boys can then girls can.*
- *Everyone should be able to wear what makes them most comfortable.*
- *It's only fair if boys can wear them.*
- *It's personal preference, what works for one, may not work for another.*
- *To allow equality and to help to bring about a change to social norms helping support EVAWG and our future.*
- *Equality. Girls and boys should be equal, what point is there in making girls wear less comfortable clothes?*
- *Because we live in the 21st century.*
- *It's very important that everyone should feel respected and comfortable in your uniform and doesn't matter what gender you are.*
- *Girls might feel more comfortable, safer, and more dignified.*

- *Boys and girls should be able to be equal and girls should not be second class citizens and wear potentially revealing clothes.*
- *I think they should be able to have a choice because it is way better for comfort.*
- *I believe we should have the choice as even depending on the weather skirts are impractical and blow in the wind, leave us cold and so on.*
- *To showcase community between everyone and we shouldn't be divided though gender.*
- *Because I am a boy and it shouldn't be up to me because I don't know what it feels like to be a girl!*
- *Girls deserve period dignity.*
- *It will make everyone feel equal.*
- *Equality, comfort, mental well-being, safety, inclusion, and modernisation.*
- *It can stop young women from being put out there and being less likely to be harassed for their clothing.*
- *Sensory issues.*
- *They should feel comfortable in school.*
- *Everyone deserves to choose the way they dress; it prepares us for the future workplace. We won't be denied trousers then.*

Appendix Four – Financial Consequences - Open Text Comments from Youth Assembly Members

In your view, are there any financial consequences of allowing girls to wear trousers to school? Why do you say that?

- *As a boy, I am not aware of the price of skirts in relation to trousers so I don't feel qualified to comment.*
- *Inevitably schools who require girls and boys to buy specific trousers and skirts will make a specific pair of trousers for girls. It doesn't make a gain or loss.*
- *Wearing trousers would be cheaper than a skirt as for me my skirt is £40 and I know a lot of girls who do wear trousers to school who have said it is cheaper than buying a skirt.*
- *Skirts in many catholic girls schools are mad expensive.*
- *Personally, my school has a petrol blue girls uniform and also brown shoes so it costs £40-£50 more than the plain black boys uniform, I think it would be cheaper to manufacture as well as afford.*
- *Well people have said it is cheaper than a skirt.*
- *It's a strange question. Skirts usually are harder to get to match and girls' uniforms cost more either way.*
- *Less fabric for trousers than skirts and cheaper for parents and school shops.*
- *I don't really understand what the question is asking me sorry.*
- *Trousers tend to be cheaper than skirts as school skirts tend to have to be from a certain supplier/shop whereas trousers tend to just be normal grey ones you can get from anywhere.*
- *Trousers are cheaper to buy.*
- *Skirts can be very expensive.*
- *Schools skirts, especially those who are brightly coloured, cannot be bought from Tesco's or M&S. But black trousers can be bought there. There would be a positive financial benefit.*
- *There are lots of school charity shops/ clothes banks which could help families save some money when it comes to buying school trousers if they have a certain design.*
- *All financial problems that arise from girls wearing trousers to school will be eliminated over time via hand me down clothing for those with siblings.*
- *It can be a financial down or up depending on the school but in my school it's always been that they could choose to wear either or not.*
- *Yes because it would be cheaper to just sell trousers.*

- *It is a lot cheaper to sell trousers, and especially for those who struggle financially because my school skirt is £60, to buy a boys uniform it is around £150 and a girls over £200.*
- *I feel allowing girls to wear trousers does not give any financial positives or negatives, however my sister wears trousers to school and feels greatly more comfortable as a result.*
- *While yes, there are some schools who use specific shades of trousers. There are still schools with standard trousers, there aren't any standard skirts. However, poor wording from the bill.*
- *I would have expected uniform prices to be almost the same for girls and boys.*
- *Because suppliers are already producing them so ultimately there would be no negative consequence even any at all.*
- *Question is confusing.*
- *I am unsure as it is hard to understand which type of financial gain it is for, schools, families, shops? it was very unclear, either way it is hard to shape what the question means more explanation.*
- *It cost the same if boys were buying trousers.*
- *In most cases skirts cost more than trousers.*
- *Trousers are much cheaper.*
- *This question led to some confusion for me due to questions such as is it positive or negative effects and who is the impact for schools? Parents? Or shops and companies?*
- *There could be positive consequences for the children/families? Trousers are often cheaper than skirts.*
- *It decreases cost for the supplier in terms of bulk buys in shops which supply to mixed gender schools or multiple schools.*
- *Skirts are more expensive than trousers because there is less fabric being used.*
- *Possibility for hand-me-downs between brothers and sisters.*
- *Passing down trousers and trousers are from Tesco usually.*
- *The wording sounds strange with a potentially accidental bias against.*
- *Lots of tights are single use and this causes a large waste of money especially in schools with non-standard coloured tights which can be more expensive.*
- *Because my trousers are like 15 quid and my sisters skirt is nearly double.*
- *As I typed in chat, my school uniform skirt is a bottle green colour and is impossible to find in stores and in our uniform store it is £40 whereas the boys have a standard black trousers around £20.*
- *It's not a specific question, financial implication for school? Or home?*
- *The question is confusing and for my school are skirt is a pleated skirt which costs £40 so black trousers would be much cheaper.*
- *Skirts break easily, e.g. the hems of skirt tend to break meaning you have to buy a replacement regularly.*

- *Trousers in general cheaper than skirts as some are long skirts with loads of fabric and trousers generally are the same price.*
- *My tights are so hard to find anywhere also.*
- *This question could be worded better to make it a more specific question that is easier to understand and answer effectively and helpfully.*
- *And if your whole siblings wore the same thing it would be so much handier.*
- *This question is a bit too generic and vague so but it might be a good matter to discuss with schools' senior leadership teams.*
- *Tights can be single use as differently coloured tights often only come in nylon and can be a lot more expensive in the first place.*
- *Teachers are pressured to police uniforms and to ensure uniforms are up to high standards which can ruin teacher- student relations and can take away from crucial class time wasted on school uniforms.*

Appendix Five – Exceptions - Open Text Comments from Youth Assembly Members

Should there be any exceptions to allowing pupils the choice to wear trousers to school? If you said 'yes', what exception(s) should there be?

- *This question feels like someone wants an excuse to not allow people to wear trousers.*
- *There could be acceptances for catholic/religious schools or for individual religious reasons.*
- *I thought it meant like an exception for boys to wear skirts.*
- *Any student of any gender or identity should have the choice of wearing trousers or skirts.*
- *Medical and other reasons.*
- *An exception is maybe you have a medical condition and are allergic to tights or maybe the skirt material then you should have the exception to wear trousers.*
- *People using the rule unfairly. Or abusing the rule to try and get out of wearing uniform? Does that make sense?*
- *I completely misunderstood that question.*
- *Some schools which may be catholic may prevent biological girls (if they're trans)*
- *Maybe for religious reasons? In predominantly catholic/ Col schools they would be against tighter clothing I suppose? Only exception I can think of. But I think there would be exceptions.*
- *I'm very confused but maybe to do with religious beliefs, all girls schools wanting to keep their uniforms.*
- *I didn't understand the question fully but possibly maybe religious or medical reason.*
- *In my perspective I feel like the expectations they are thinking about is religious beliefs where they can't show skin or if anyone's having a disability, trousers would make it more accessible.*
- *I don't really know what it means.*
- *I felt this was a very poorly worded question I do not know what it was actually asking.*

Appendix Six – Additional points - Open Text Comments from Youth Assembly Members

Is there anything else you'd like to say about the idea of a law to allow all pupils the choice to wear trousers in school?

- *Why is this even a debate, for equality why not?*
- *There is a stigma around it so allowing it would dismantle the stigma.*
- *I've seen from personal experience that there has been no bullying or problems with girls wearing trousers actually the main problems at my school in England were girls wearing too short skirts.*
- *It's not the 1900sm so let us be us.*
- *The question's not clear at all.*
- *Catholic schools may not like trans people wearing skirts.*
- *The survey was hard to understand.*
- *Allowing all pupils to wear trousers ensures equal treatment regardless of gender. Girls should have the same clothing choices as boys, and uniforms should not reinforce outdated gender norms.*
- *Period dignity is an easy way to get it passed when I'd say I feel more comfortable in a dark coloured skirt than grey trousers. Trousers can be less form fitting than skirts.*
- *Girls sometimes get harassed or talked about for their current uniform.*
- *We are one of only 3 countries in Europe who have a school uniform in most schools. School uniform has also been banned completely in Finland.*
- *I feel many of these questions were very poorly worded and I along with others did not understand what many of these questions were.*
- *We live in a progressive society Why not change?*
- *Trousers are often practical for school life's especially in cold weather, during physical activity or while sitting on the floor.*
- *My friend looked quite masculine but identifies as a girl. She would be constantly asked "what bathroom do you use" and asked if she was boy or a girl. She could've avoided this with trousers.*
- *Studies show that greater comfort actually helps pupils focus better on learning and have improved concentration.*

Appendix Seven – Youth Assembly Email Responses

Email Submission 1

I am in support of trousers in schools for the following reasons:

- *Skirts may feel like they are enforcing outdated gender stereotypes.*
- *Trousers are more practical for sports and the North's common cold weather, improving students' comfort and focus.*
- *Trousers can also better accommodate religious requirements for modesty.*
- *Skirts can also impact a transgender or non-binary student's ability to feel safe and affirmed in their identity.*
- *Gendered uniform policies can be seen as sex discrimination, therefore potentially breaching equality laws by giving girls less favourable treatment.*

Also, I put out a post yesterday, talking about how I would be on a call with the Youth Assembly with regard to this consultation, and I was contacted by a mother who told me her daughter wears trousers for sensory issues and gets bullied for being different and her mother believes if wearing trousers were a personal choice, more people would wear them and thus the bullying would no longer be an issue.

I want to also briefly give my views on the 'no uniform at all' conversation we had. I support uniforms not just because they make you feel a part of a team, but because of the more personal reasons: If there were no uniforms, and a student wore the same outfit two days in a row, they might get bullied or talked about. If someone wore a certain t-shirt, jumper, jeans, trousers or pair of shoes they might get bullied or talked about and with there already being staggering statistics telling us how bad the mental health crisis is in young people, we can't risk giving bullies another thing to talk about.

I'd also like to build on Rafael's point of passing down from brother to sister, I thought that was a really good point. I know Lucy said that girls are a different shape as they grow and that girls' trousers are different to boys' trousers, I get that, but currently 64% of children from a working household live in poverty and despite the obvious gender differences, I still think this would help reduce costs for many families.

Email Submission 2

Another thing is on the people who are saying that people will feel more safe in their own clothing instead of their school uniform, a lot of people I know who dress "out of the norm" in our town sometimes gets made fun of. My cousin lives around an area where there's a lot of people wearing mainly "normal" clothes make fun of people wearing out of the normal clothing, which would be the same in my school — I recently got my hair dyed with pink highlights and

even then I got ridiculed and laughed at by older years, some people would be scared to be different in their schools if they are treated differently or like I said, dress out of the norm in schools that have schools in the norm!