

September 2026



**REPORT ON SCHOOL UNIFORMS
(TROUSERS) BILL**
Northern Ireland Youth Assembly

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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.

The Youth Assembly was invited to provide evidence to the Ad Hoc Committee on the *School Uniform (Trousers) Bill* on 15 September 2026. As part of their preparation, Members reviewed the Bill¹, the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum,² alongside the Bill Paper³ produced by the Assembly's Research and Information Service (RaISe) for the *School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill*. They also conducted their own research which has helped to build a fuller understanding of both the scale of the issue and the key policy considerations arising during legislative scrutiny.

The Youth Assembly wishes to express their thanks to the Ad Hoc Committee for the opportunity to share their views on this issue.

¹ School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/legislation/bills/executive-bills/mandate-2022-2027/school-uniforms-trousers/school-uniforms-trousers-bill---as-introduced--fpv.pdf>

² Northern Ireland Assembly Explanatory and Financial Memorandum, *School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill*, NIA Bill 40/22-27 EFM), [school-uniforms-trousers---efm---as-introduced---fpv.pdf](#)

³ Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service, *School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Bill* (Belfast: Northern Ireland Assembly, April 2025), NIAR 77-2025, [Assembly Research and Information Service Research Paper - School Uniforms \(Guidelines and Allowances\) Bill](#)

Executive Summary

The Youth Assembly supports both key provisions of the *School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill*. Members support the proposal to establish a clear right for all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform and the provision requiring schools to permit appropriate choices of trousers, shorts or other leg coverings during recreational, sporting and outdoor activities. Members believe these measures would help ensure that pupils can make choices that best meet their individual needs while promoting greater equality, dignity and inclusion within schools.

This report brings together evidence gathered by the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly on school uniform and whether all pupils should have the right to wear trousers as part of their school uniform. It draws on three strands of Youth Assembly engagement:

- A Northern Ireland-wide Survey on Young Women's Rights in Schools conducted in 2025;
- A focused consultation with Youth Assembly Members followed by formal evidence session with the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Education in January 2026;
- A pulse survey conducted in July and August 2026, supplemented by Youth Assembly Members' lived experiences.

The evidence demonstrates a clear and consistent pattern of support for greater choice in school uniform. In the January 2026 consultation, 98% of Youth Assembly Members who responded supported allowing all pupils the choice to wear trousers. In the subsequent pulse survey, 92% of respondents agreed that all pupils should have the right to wear trousers, while 95% supported pupils having the right to wear trousers, shorts or other appropriate leg coverings during recreational, sporting or outdoor activities.

Across the different phases of engagement, young people repeatedly connected school uniform choice with comfort, equality, dignity, safety, inclusion and participation. In the pulse survey, respondents anticipated particularly positive effects on comfort, confidence, participation in school activities, managing periods and pupils' sense of inclusion and equality. The most commonly identified benefits of allowing all pupils to wear trousers were comfort, privacy and modesty, freedom of movement and period dignity.

The lived experiences shared by Youth Assembly Members provide important context for these quantitative findings. Members described significant variation between

schools. Some schools already offer trousers as an ordinary uniform option, while in others pupils may be required to seek permission, provide medical justification or follow additional procedures before being allowed to wear them. Members also described social stigma in schools where trousers were technically permitted, including being judged, mocked or questioned about their gender identity for choosing to wear them.

These experiences highlight an important distinction between formal permission and meaningful choice. The evidence suggests that the presence of trousers within a school uniform policy does not necessarily mean that pupils feel able to choose them freely. Cost, restrictive suppliers, requirements for special permission and fear of standing out can all limit pupils' ability to exercise that choice in practice.

Concerns about dignity and safety also remained prominent. Young people described discomfort associated with skirts, experiences of sexualisation and unequal expectations placed on girls, including in relation to PE uniform and the management of inappropriate behaviour by others. These findings echo concerns first identified through the Youth Assembly's 2025 work, where young people raised issues relating to physical discomfort, upskirting, unwanted photographs, sexual comments and the monitoring of skirt length.

Overall, the evidence gathered indicates sustained support for pupils being able to choose trousers as part of their school uniform. The findings suggest that young people are not seeking to remove existing uniform options, but to ensure that pupils can choose from those options in a way that is consistent, accessible and free from unnecessary stigma or additional requirements. The lived-experience evidence further demonstrates why, for many young people, the issue extends beyond whether trousers are technically permitted and instead concerns whether pupils have a genuine and equal opportunity to choose the uniform in which they feel most comfortable, confident and able to participate in school life.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence gathered through its engagement, the Youth Assembly recommends that the Committee supports the universal right for all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform, without requiring special permission, medical evidence or additional approval processes; and supports the wearing of appropriate trousers, shorts or other leg coverings for recreational, sporting and outdoor activities.

The Committee should also consider:

1. How to ensure that any right established in legislation is accessible in practice, so that pupils are not discouraged from exercising their choice through administrative requirements or social stigma.
2. How to ensure affordability and accessibility in implementation, including the impact of supplier requirements and branded uniform items on families.
3. The importance of schools receiving clear guidance to support consistent application of any new legislative requirements and to promote equality of choice for all pupils.

Research

The issue of school uniform choice, particularly the ability of pupils to wear trousers, is not a new one for the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly. It has emerged repeatedly through Youth Assembly surveys, consultations, committee discussions and evidence sessions. Across this work, young people have consistently linked school uniform policies to wider issues including comfort, dignity, equality, inclusion, safety and personal choice.

The following section summarises the evidence gathered through the Youth Assembly's engagement on this issue since 2025 and demonstrates the consistent support expressed by young people for these changes.

2025 Young Women's Rights in Schools Survey

In January and February 2025, the Youth Assembly's Rights and Equality Committee conducted a Northern Ireland-wide survey examining young people's experiences in school. The survey gathered the views of 1,137 young people aged 11–18.

School uniform emerged as an important issue within the responses. When asked whether girls in their school could wear trousers, 36.2% of respondents said that they did, while 34.3% said that they did not. A further 23.2% did not know, suggesting considerable variation between schools and some uncertainty about existing uniform policies.

Young people also reported mixed experiences of comfort. Only 20.1% believed that girls were comfortable in their school uniforms, while 37.5% believed they were comfortable only “to some extent” and almost one quarter (24.9%) believed that girls were not comfortable. Similar concerns were expressed in relation to PE kit.

These concerns became particularly clear in the qualitative responses. More than 80 comments referred to the physical discomfort experienced by young women, including itchy tights, heavy or scratchy materials, poorly fitting skirts and uniforms which were unsuitable for different weather conditions. Respondents also raised concerns about the way skirt length was monitored, with some describing rules and conversations about girls' clothing as sexualising.

Closely connected to this were concerns about dignity and safety. Young people described experiences of upskirting, unwanted photographs and sexual comments relating to skirts. Some felt that existing uniform policies placed responsibility on girls to

protect themselves from inappropriate behaviour rather than addressing the behaviour itself.

One of the most common suggestions arising from these responses was that pupils should be able to wear trousers as an ordinary alternative to skirts. Young people described situations in which wearing trousers required medical evidence, parental meetings, permission from senior staff or disclosure of gender identity. Others explained that, even where trousers were technically permitted, fear of being singled out or bullied could prevent pupils from choosing them. The clear preference expressed through the survey was therefore not simply for trousers to be permitted in exceptional circumstances, but for them to be available without stigma, bureaucracy or special permission.

The 2025 work therefore established an important foundation for the Youth Assembly's subsequent engagement on this issue. It demonstrated that school uniform was connected in young people's experiences to wider questions of comfort, equality, dignity, safety, sexism and inclusion.

January 2026 Consultation and Evidence Session

In January 2026, the Assembly's Committee for Education invited the Youth Assembly to consider their proposal for legislation which would give all pupils the choice to wear trousers at school as a universal right. Youth Assembly Members met online to discuss the proposal, and a total of 48 current Youth Assembly Members and 11 Legacy Youth Assembly Members participated in the session. The findings informed evidence subsequently provided by Youth Assembly Members to the Committee for Education as part of its scrutiny of the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill.

There was overwhelming support for giving all pupils the choice to wear trousers. Of the 50 Members who answered the question, 49 (98%) said that all pupils should be allowed the choice to wear trousers, with one respondent disagreeing and none selecting "unsure".

Analysis of the different forms of evidence identified five recurring themes:

- **Comfort and wellbeing:** Young people described uncomfortable uniform as distracting and, for some pupils, particularly difficult because of sensory needs. Trousers were viewed as one practical means of making pupils more comfortable during the school day.

- **Equality:** Members questioned why access to trousers should differ according to gender or according to the school a pupil attends. Different policies between schools were viewed as creating inconsistent treatment.
- **Dignity and safety:** Period dignity, feelings of exposure and vulnerability, and concerns about harassment featured prominently. Members also identified implications for transgender and non-binary pupils, pupils with disabilities and pupils with religious modesty requirements.
- **Practicality:** Trousers were viewed as better suited to the Northern Ireland climate, movement and participation in school activities. Members emphasised that trousers were already an established part of many school uniforms and therefore did not necessarily conflict with school identity or standards.
- **Personal autonomy:** Young people argued that pupils should have meaningful choice about which approved uniform option they wear. They also highlighted the stigma which can arise where trousers are technically available to girls but are regarded as unusual or require special arrangements.

Members also considered the potential financial implications of greater uniform choice. The dominant view was that allowing trousers would be either cost-neutral or potentially cost-saving, for example by reducing the need for specialist skirts, tights and other gender-specific items and by making it easier for uniform to be passed between siblings. Where financial concerns were expressed, they related primarily to how a change would be implemented rather than opposition to the principle itself.

The findings from this consultation informed oral evidence given by Youth Assembly Members to the Assembly's Committee for Education during its discussions on the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill. Youth Assembly Members outlined the strong support for greater uniform choice and discussed the themes identified through the consultation, including comfort and wellbeing, dignity and safety, practicality, and personal autonomy. The evidence formed part of the Committee's consideration of the Bill.

Taken together, the January 2026 consultation and evidence session reinforced the findings of the earlier Youth Assembly work. Young people did not generally regard the issue as a minor change to school dress codes. Instead, they connected uniform choice to wellbeing, participation, equality, dignity, safety, inclusion and respect.

July–August 2026 Youth Assembly pulse survey

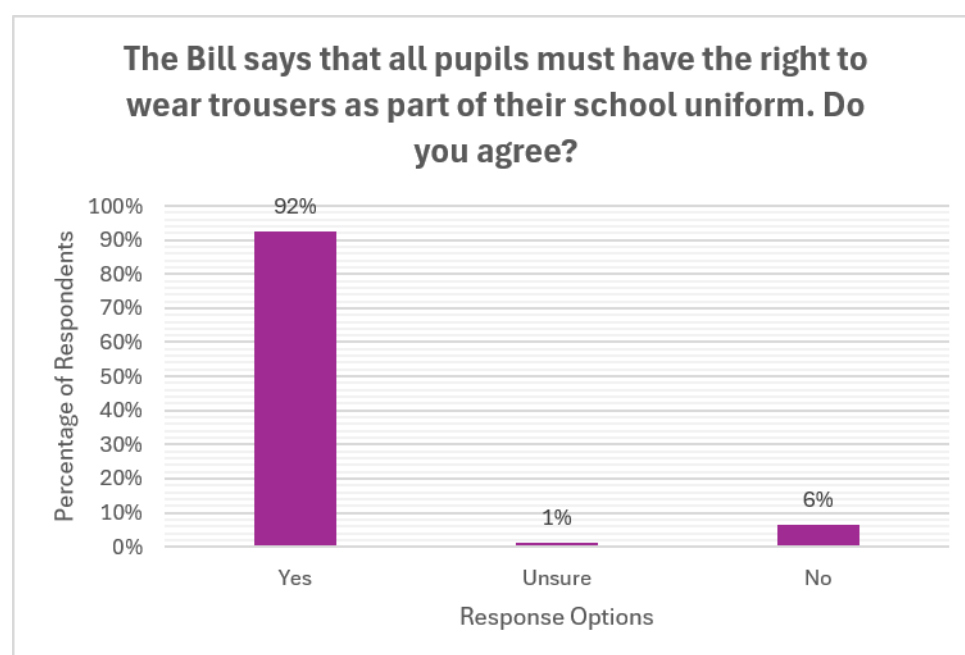
To inform the Youth Assembly's contribution to the Ad Hoc Committee, a further online survey was conducted between 10 July and 3 August 2026 to obtain wider views from

young people on the specific proposals contained within the School Uniforms (Trousers) Bill.

A total of 263 responses was received during the consultation period. Of these, 173 responses were submitted directly by young people, while 90 responses were submitted by individuals responding on behalf of a young person such as parents and carers. The survey was promoted through social media channels and email networks.

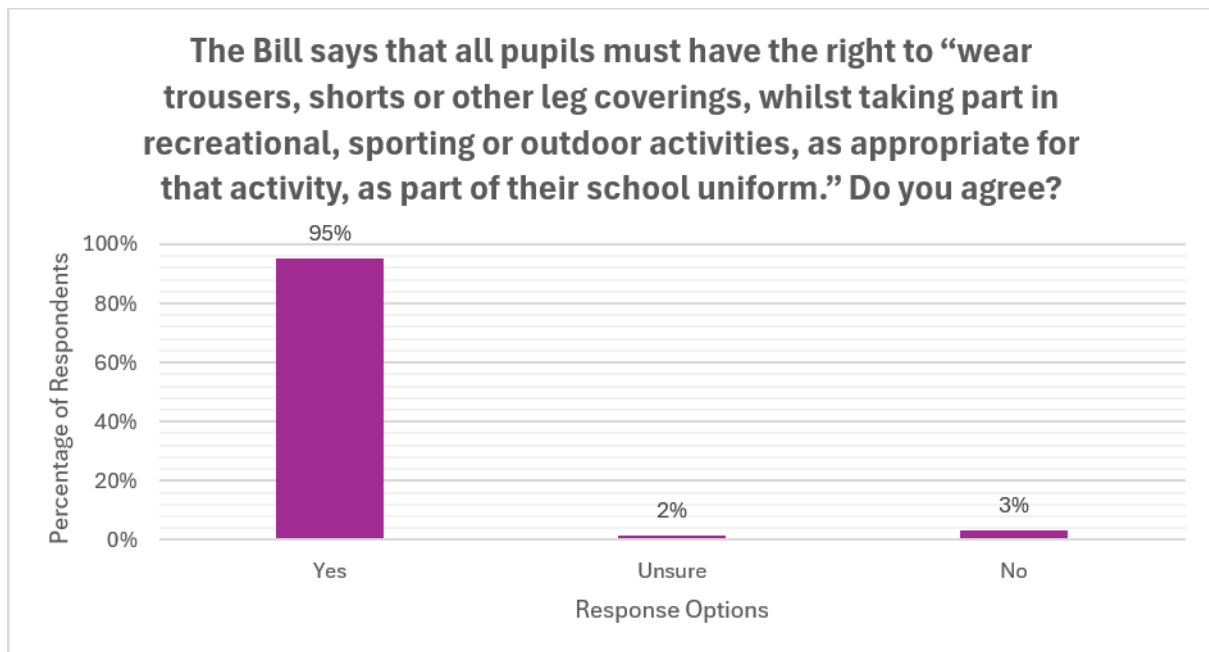
As an open consultation promoted through Youth Assembly networks, the survey was not intended to provide a representative sample of all young people in Northern Ireland. The findings should therefore be understood as an indication of the views and experiences of those who chose to participate. Below are the questions asked and the results of the survey.

The Bill says that all pupils must have the right to wear trousers as part of their school uniform. Do you agree?



The survey found very strong support for the proposal that all pupils should have the right to wear trousers as part of their school uniform. Overall, 92% of respondents agreed with the proposal, while 6% disagreed and 1% were unsure. This indicates a general consensus among respondents in favour of giving all pupils the option to wear trousers, with only a small minority expressing opposition or uncertainty.

The right to wear trousers, shorts or other leg coverings whilst taking part in recreational, sporting or outdoor activities



The majority of respondents expressed support for the proposal that pupils should have the right to wear trousers, shorts or other appropriate leg coverings while taking part in recreational, sporting or outdoor activities as part of their school uniform. Ninety-five per cent of respondents agreed with the proposal, while 3% disagreed and 2% were unsure.

To what extent, if at all, do you think allowing all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform would affect the following?

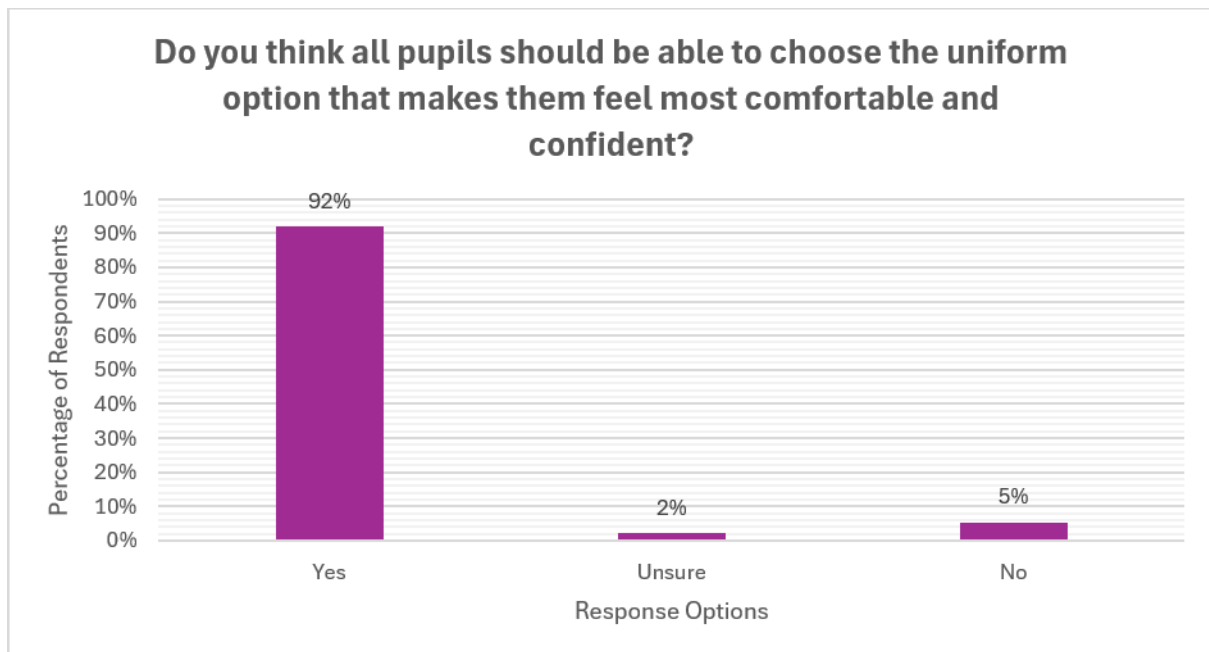
	Much worse	A little worse	No change	A little better	Much better
Comfort in school	4	7	20	33	199
Confidence	9	7	25	43	179
Participation in school activities	6	4	38	42	173
Managing periods at school	4	9	36	36	178
Sense of inclusion/equality	6	6	26	39	186

Respondents were asked to what extent they thought allowing all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform would affect a range of outcomes. Across all measures, most respondents felt the change would have a positive impact. The strongest perceived benefit was for comfort in school, with 199 respondents saying it would make this much better and a further 33 saying it would make it a little better. Similarly, confidence was expected to improve, with 179 respondents anticipating it would be much better and 43 saying it would be a little better.

Respondents also felt that allowing pupils to wear trousers would positively affect participation in school activities, with 173 respondents selecting much better and 42 choosing a little better. Views were similarly positive regarding managing periods in school and instilling a sense of inclusion and equality. Across all five areas, relatively few respondents felt that allowing all pupils to wear trousers would make things worse, while a smaller number felt it would make no difference.

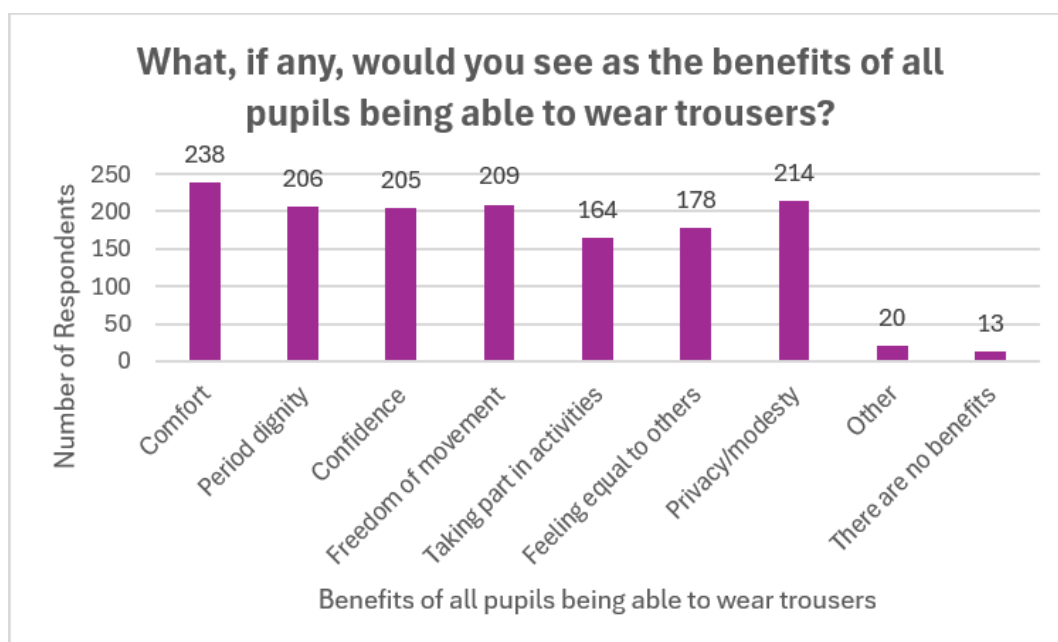
Overall, the findings suggest that respondents believe giving all pupils the option to wear trousers would have wide-ranging benefits for comfort, confidence, participation, inclusion, and the management of periods at school.

Do you think all pupils should be able to choose the uniform option that makes them feel most comfortable and confident?



The survey found a high level of support for allowing pupils to choose the uniform option that makes them feel most comfortable and confident. Overall, 92% of respondents agreed that all pupils should be able to choose the uniform option that best suits them, while 5% disagreed and 2% were unsure.

What, if any, would you see as the benefits of all pupils being able to wear trousers? Select all that apply



The most commonly identified benefits of allowing all pupils to wear trousers were comfort, privacy/modesty, freedom of movement, and period dignity. A high number of respondents also highlighted benefits for feeling equal to others and participation in activities. Only 13 participants felt that there would be no benefits.

Twenty respondents selected 'other' and provided additional comments regarding the benefits of allowing all pupils to wear trousers. Several of these emphasised the importance of personal choice and autonomy.

"Choice over their own bodies."

"Freedom of choice. We tell children they should be themselves and then they are told what to wear."

Other responses highlighted practical and financial benefits.

"Cost, as a pair of trousers and socks is often cheaper than a skirt, socks/tights, and modesty shorts. Plus, with trousers children are often allowed plain black/grey unbranded socks and those in skirts are required to wear official branded socks at greater expense."

"Help in bad weather."

"Warmth."

A number of responses focused on equality, inclusion and supporting diverse identities.

“Gender equality.”

“Greater flexibility allows schools to meet the diverse needs of the pupils while maintaining a smart and consistent uniform policy.”

“Better sensory wise for neurodivergent people, trousers mean no one is forced to wear feminine clothing if they don’t feel comfortable.”

Some responses focused on privacy, dignity and reducing bullying.

“Freedom from worry/exploitation of being upskirted.”

“Some people are not confident in shaving their legs or doesn’t like it and they can get bullied in school for that.”

Finally, one respondent provided a detailed reflection on the wider benefits.

“This overall creates an environment a pupil will more likely be willing to learn in and comfortable while doing so, it also helps those in the trans community feel more included and thought about within education, reducing down the risk of poor mental health in relation to isolation. Additionally many women do not wear skirts nor dresses anymore and prefer not to, the original uniforms were created in a state where gender roles were extremely valued in society which is just not the case anymore. Any gender should be able to wear what they prefer to in their uniforms. This is the modern approach to schooling and should be taken into account.”

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about this Bill?

The final question in the survey invited respondents to share any additional views on the Bill. Responses were varied, but several key themes emerged. A significant number of respondents expressed surprise that legislation was still required to secure the right for all pupils to wear trousers. Many respondents viewed this as being a matter of equality and felt that schools should already be offering this choice, as is the case in other jurisdictions such as England and the Republic of Ireland.

“I genuinely can’t believe this even has to be discussed in 2026. It’s shameful.”

“We really shouldn’t have to beg to wear trousers! Like we aren’t living in the dark ages.”

“It’s utterly embarrassing at that this is an issue at all.”

“Absolutely archaic that young girls/women are STILL being deprived of the right to wear trousers to school.”

Other respondents linked clothing choice directly to wellbeing, confidence and participation in school life. Respondents felt that pupils who were comfortable in their uniform were more likely to fully engage in learning and school activities.

"Feeling uncomfortable in school due to having to wear a skirt seriously has an impact upon young women's ability to access education."

"I only started to feel comfortable in my school when I could wear trousers."

"I support this bill for my daughters future choices and equality in school, this is more than just a skirt, it's freedom to participate in a world in comfort, confidence and dignity."

Many respondents viewed the Bill as an important equality measure which would bring school policies into line with modern expectations.

"Everyone should have the right to wear trousers or skirts as they please regardless of their sex at birth or gender identity."

"I think everyone should have the right to choose what they feel most comfortable in."

Some comments highlighted the potential benefits of the Bill for neurodivergent pupils and transgender or gender-diverse young people.

"As an autistic young person I think wearing trousers should be an option for everyone with no big hassle."

"I think there should be less gender binary within uniform options. All options should be available to all pupils."

Respondents also identified a number of practical advantages to allowing pupils to wear trousers, particularly in relation to weather, periods, privacy and safety. Comments referred to concerns about skirt lengths, unwanted attention and the management of periods. Respondents suggested that trousers could provide greater comfort, reassurance and dignity in these situations.

"Allowing all children to wear trousers in school will add to their learning experience, school day, and confidence."

Approximately 20 responses either disagreed with the Bill or questioned whether legislation was necessary. Concerns included maintaining school standards and protecting schools' ability to set their own policies.

"Uniform instils discipline. It teaches us boundaries and respect."

"Schools should be able to allow girls to wear trousers if they wish, similar to the boys at the same school. This should not require legislation or a bill."

Overall, the additional comments reinforced the survey's broader findings. Most respondents viewed the Bill positively and described it as an important step towards improving comfort, dignity, inclusion and equality for pupils. While a minority raised concerns about school autonomy, tradition and questioned the need for legislative intervention, the dominant view was that all pupils should have the right to choose the uniform option that best meets their needs and allows them to participate confidently in school life.

Youth Assembly Members' Lived Experiences

Alongside the wider pulse survey, Youth Assembly Members were invited to share their own lived experiences of school uniform during an online consultation session. Members were encouraged to reflect on both positive and negative experiences, including issues relating to equality, comfort, PE and sport, cost, and the impact of uniform on their day-to-day experience at school. There were 36 Members who participated in the session.

The responses provide important qualitative context to the survey findings. They demonstrate that the question of whether pupils should be able to wear trousers is not simply a theoretical issue for many young people. Members described direct experiences of physical discomfort, restrictive school policies, social stigma, unequal expectations and concerns about dignity and safety.

Permission does not always mean meaningful choice

A particularly important finding from the lived-experience responses was the distinction between trousers being technically permitted and pupils being able to choose them freely in practice. Several Members described policies which required girls to seek permission before wearing trousers.

“My school allows trousers for girls, but unfortunately they have to ask before being allowed.”

“In my school until last year, girls weren't allowed to wear trousers unless you got special permission from the principal.”

“I attend a female only grammar school; from my understanding it would be a lengthy process to be granted permission to wear trousers.”

In another school, a Member reported that very few pupils were permitted to wear trousers and that a medical reason was required.

“I find that in my school they're very 'traditional' when it comes to the uniform in that it's very frowned upon to even suggest letting girls wear trousers and there's very few who are allowed and they needed a doctor's note about transitioning or something similar that I found absurd that you have to have a medical reason to wear a piece of clothing.”

These accounts suggest that including trousers somewhere within a school uniform policy does not necessarily equate to genuine choice. Where pupils are required to explain or justify why they want to wear them, trousers can remain positioned as an exceptional rather than ordinary uniform option.

Stigma and fear of standing out

Members also described social stigma as a significant barrier, including in schools where girls were formally allowed to wear trousers.

“My school does allow trousers but it’s mostly social pressure that bars people from wearing them, but if every school is forced more people will wear them and bring down the stigma around it”

“If you are older and wear trousers you are made fun of because people think you are trans or have medical problems.”

One Member gave a particularly direct account of what happened when they exercised the choice available to them.

“When I finally did wear trousers, people would stare at me, or ask me if I was trans and make fun of me, for simply just wearing what I felt comfortable in.”

Even where a school was described positively for allowing anyone to wear trousers, stigma remained.

“Our school does trousers quite well anyone can wear trousers, but it would have a bit of stigma around it, girls would be identified as the girl that wears trousers etc, and if someone started to wear trousers they would be judged.”

Members suggested that making trousers an ordinary option across schools could help to normalise their use and reduce the perception that a pupil wearing trousers is making a statement about their health, gender identity or personal circumstances.

Dignity, exposure and sexualisation

Several contributions concerned dignity and the experience of wearing skirts in public or around school.

“I find it uncomfortable even going upstairs in front of people or going up the steps on the bus. I remember my form teacher talking to the girls telling us that our skirts were making male staff uncomfortable, and then she proceeded to tell us to wear two pairs of tights???”

“Outside of school, a lot of girls would be cat called or sexualised by wearing a skirt and tights.”

Members also described school rules which appeared to have developed in response to concerns about inappropriate behaviour towards girls. In one exchange, a Member explained that girls wearing skirts could not leave school without changing, while boys could leave in shorts. Another Member responded that their school had operated a similar policy following *“incidents with members of the public being inappropriate with girls in their skirts.”*

These experiences closely echo concerns raised through the Youth Assembly’s earlier work about exposure, upskirting, sexualisation and the extent to which responsibility for managing these risks can fall disproportionately on girls.

Cost and suppliers

The experiences shared by Members also demonstrate that greater uniform choice does not automatically resolve concerns about affordability. One Member who had chosen trousers said that they were *“so expensive”* because they were available from only one brand. Another described a school where trousers had been introduced but pupils were required to purchase a specific expensive brand:

“Why does it matter what brand my trousers are as long as they are black?”

Members also raised the continuing costs associated with skirts and tights.

“I personally love the look of uniforms, however I wish tights were longer lasting as it can get costly quickly already on top of the cost of skirts blazers etc, which isn’t fair as boys don’t need to buy them and for some girls who are concerned about the environment, trousers would be a good solution.”

The responses therefore suggest that the affordability of trousers may depend considerably on implementation. Making trousers an available option could reduce some existing uniform costs, but this benefit may be undermined where schools restrict families to a particular branded supplier.

Examples of inclusive practice

Not all Members described negative experiences. Some reported that their schools already allowed trousers regardless of gender, with one Member noting that there was “*no stigma associated*” with doing so. Another described how their school’s student voice had agreed to make trousers an option for everyone “*to promote a sense of inclusiveness and a means of avoiding any physical or mental discomfort.*” These examples demonstrate that some schools have already implemented more flexible approaches successfully, although Members’ experiences suggest that this practice is not consistent across schools.

Conclusion

Taken together, the lived experiences of the Youth Assembly Members help explain the strong quantitative support recorded through the pulse survey. Their contributions suggest that the issue is not simply whether trousers appear on a uniform list, but whether pupils can genuinely access that choice without needing permission, explaining their identity or medical circumstances, paying excessive costs, or risking judgement from their peers. The accounts also demonstrate considerable variation between schools. While some Members described inclusive and flexible approaches, others reported restrictive policies and social barriers. These experiences provide context for young people’s support for a consistent right to wear trousers. These experiences help to explain the wider support for a universal approach, which could move trousers from an exceptional or stigmatised choice to an ordinary part of school uniform.

Discussion and recommendations

The evidence presented in this report demonstrates a high level of consistency, with the same core themes emerging across the Youth Assembly's engagement. Young people have repeatedly communicated that school uniform policies should support comfort, dignity, safety, inclusion and confident participation in school life.

The 2025 Youth Assembly Survey on Young Women's Rights in Schools identified school uniform as an issue of concern within young people's wider experiences of school. Respondents described physical discomfort, concerns about skirt length, experiences of sexualisation and upskirting, and unequal expectations placed on girls. A common recommendation was that trousers should be available as an ordinary uniform option without the need for special permission or justification.

These concerns were reinforced during the Youth Assembly's consideration of the principle of a universal right to wear trousers in January 2026. Of the 50 Members who responded, 49 supported allowing all pupils the choice to wear trousers. Members consistently linked that choice to comfort and wellbeing, equality, dignity and safety, practicality and personal autonomy. Similar findings emerged through the July-August 2026 pulse survey, where 92% of respondents agreed that all pupils should have the right to wear trousers as part of their school uniform and 95% supported the right to wear trousers, shorts or other appropriate leg coverings during recreational, sporting and outdoor activities.

Importantly, the evidence suggests that young people are seeking greater choice rather than the removal of existing uniform options. The consistent message was that pupils should be able to choose the approved uniform option that best supports their comfort, confidence, dignity and individual circumstances.

The lived experiences shared by Youth Assembly Members help explain why this issue remains significant. They demonstrate a clear distinction between trousers being formally permitted within a school uniform policy and pupils being able to exercise that choice in practice. While some schools already provide accessible and inclusive options, others require pupils to seek permission, provide medical justification or navigate additional administrative processes before being allowed to wear trousers. Members also described social barriers, including being stared at, questioned or mocked for choosing trousers. This evidence suggests that availability does not always result in meaningful accessibility.

Experiences reported by Members also highlight considerable variation between schools. Some schools have adopted inclusive policies that allow pupils to wear trousers regardless of gender, while others continue to operate more restrictive

arrangements. As a result, a pupil's ability to exercise choice can depend significantly on the school they attend. This variation is central to the policy question considered by the Committee. While retaining local decision-making preserves school autonomy, the evidence demonstrates that voluntary change has not occurred consistently across all schools. Many young people therefore viewed this legislation as necessary to ensure that choice is available equally to all pupils rather than being determined by individual school policies.

The evidence further indicates that the effects of uniform policy extend beyond clothing preferences. Physical comfort emerged as one of the most prominent considerations across all engagement activities. However, young people frequently connected comfort with wider educational experiences, including confidence, concentration and willingness to participate in school life. Members also linked uniform policy to dignity and safety, describing concerns about feeling exposed in skirts while using stairs or public transport and referring to experiences of sexualisation or unwanted attention. Collectively, these experiences suggest that uniform choices can influence how secure, respected and confident pupils feel throughout the school day.

Affordability also emerged as an important implementation issue. While some respondents believed greater flexibility could reduce costs for families, particularly where trousers replace skirts, tights or other gender-specific items, Members highlighted examples where trousers could only be purchased from specific suppliers at significant cost. The evidence therefore suggests that the practical benefits of increased choice will depend partly on implementation. Measures that allow affordable and accessible uniform options may be important in ensuring that any changes deliver meaningful benefits for pupils and families.

Although the overall findings demonstrate strong support for the Bill's provisions, it is important to acknowledge that there was not complete consensus. A minority of respondents questioned whether legislation was necessary and argued that decisions about uniform should remain the responsibility of individual schools. These views highlight a distinction between support for trouser choice itself and support for legislation as the mechanism for delivering that choice. Nevertheless, such views represented a comparatively small proportion of responses, while support for a universal right to wear trousers remained consistently high across all strands of the Youth Assembly's engagement.

Taken as a whole, the evidence demonstrates sustained and substantial support among participating young people for all pupils having the right to wear trousers as part of their school uniform and for appropriate choices of trousers, shorts or other leg coverings during recreational, sporting and outdoor activities. The evidence suggests that the key issue for young people is not simply whether trousers are mentioned within school policies, but whether every pupil can genuinely and equally exercise that choice in

practice. While many young people felt that such changes should not require legislation, their experiences indicate that inconsistent practice across schools has led them to view a statutory right as the most effective way to ensure comfort, dignity, equality and inclusion for all pupils, regardless of the school they attend.

Recommendations

Based on the evidence gathered through its engagement, the Youth Assembly recommends that the Committee supports the universal right for all pupils to wear trousers as part of their school uniform, without requiring special permission, medical evidence or additional approval processes; and supports the wearing of appropriate trousers, shorts or other leg coverings for recreational, sporting and outdoor activities.

The Committee should also consider:

1. How to ensure that any right established in legislation is accessible in practice, so that pupils are not discouraged from exercising their choice through administrative requirements or social stigma.
2. How to ensure affordability and accessibility in implementation, including the impact of supplier requirements and branded uniform items on families.
3. The importance of schools receiving clear guidance to support consistent application of any new legislative requirements and to promote equality of choice for all pupils.