



Because growing
up can be hard

 **Kim McGuinness**
North East Mayor

North East School Uniform Charter

children-ne.org.uk



**North East
Uniform
Charter**

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness | Children North East

A photograph of two young boys running towards the camera. The boy on the left is a Black child with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue school sweater with a red and blue backpack. The boy on the right is a white child with blonde hair, wearing a dark blue school sweater over a white collared shirt and dark grey trousers. They are both smiling broadly. In the background, other children in school uniforms are visible, running on a paved path next to a brick building.

The average primary school uniform in the North East costs £188 a year.

The average secondary school uniform in the North East costs £241 a year.

We understand our communities in the North East and many schools have already reduced the costs, to bring us down from the national average... but more can be done to further support families to reduce costs.

The North East School Uniform Charter, created in partnership between Children North East and North East Mayor Kim McGuinness, sets out a shared regional commitment to ensuring that school uniforms are affordable, accessible, and equitable for every child. Its purpose is to reduce financial barriers that prevent children from fully participating in school life, and to support families across the North East to access uniform without hardship or stigma.

Children North East has been working since 1891 to support babies, children, young people, and families to grow up happy and healthy. Since 2011, our Poverty Proofing® programme has helped schools, healthcare providers, cultural organisations and others identify and remove the hidden barriers that disadvantage those children living in poverty. Having worked with over 600 schools, and consulted thousands of pupils, families, teachers, governors and stakeholders, we have a deep understanding of how financial pressures shape children's experiences and their ability to learn.

School uniform is one of the most significant factors influencing a child's day-to-day experience at school. From branded trainers to having enough clean shirts; clothing affects how children feel, how they are perceived by peers, and how confidently they can participate. With the average secondary school uniform costing over £400, and often more once PE kits and extras are included, the financial burden on families is substantial.

By establishing a region-wide commitment to accessible and affordable uniforms, we can ensure no child is singled out because of what they wear, no parent must choose between uniform and essentials, and every child can attend school with dignity and confidence.

What we mean by 'Uniform'

Uniform includes any clothing, footwear, accessories, or equipment that a pupil is required to wear or have visible when attending school. This covers items worn during the school day, while travelling to and from school, during lessons, PE, clubs, trips, and other school activities.

Typical uniform items include shirts, blouses, trousers, skirts, dresses, blazers, jumpers, ties, socks, shoes, full PE kit (including trainers, football boots, shin guards etc), coats, bags, and other accessories where these are specified by the school. Uniform can include both branded and non-branded items, as well as seasonal clothing that pupils are required to wear.

For the purposes of school uniform requirements, any compulsory item that can be seen when a pupil attends school counts as uniform. Schools cannot avoid branded uniform limits by treating summer and winter versions of the same item as separate requirements.

From September 2026, schools must limit the number of compulsory branded uniform and PE kit items. Primary schools may require no more than three branded items total, while secondary and middle schools may require up to four branded items only where one of those items is a tie.

The Charter

This charter outlines the commitment for every school and education setting to enable students equitable access to education. From Pre-Key Stage 1 through to college, this responsibility extends beyond school uniform to include sports equipment, dress codes, learning resources, and all other requirements that may affect participation and inclusion.

The Supporter of North East Uniform Charter level recognises settings that adhere to government guidelines and place students and families at the centre of all uniform-related decisions.

The Champion of North East Uniform Charter level is for settings that go further, actively ensuring affordability, accessibility, and fairness across every aspect of what students are required to wear.



Purpose and principles



Affordability



Branded items



Generic uniform



Additional Items



Consultation / Family support



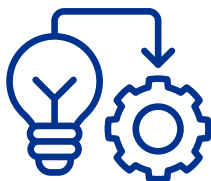
Supply and procurement



Second-hand uniform



Enforcement



Implementation



Equality and Inclusion



Monitoring and review / Co-production



Purpose and principles

Prioritise affordability in all uniform decisions

Embed affordability, accessibility, and sustainability throughout



Affordability

Reduce costs for families

Proactively design for affordability, completing affordability assessments and publishing approximate costs in the policy



Branded items

Minimise branded items, including PE kit (up to 3, 4 including a tie)

Go beyond expectations to keep branding as low as possible (0 - 2 branded items, including PE kit)



Generic uniform

Use generic non-branded items where possible

Specify simple, non-branded requirements to reduce cost and increase access



Additional Items

Create clear expectations about unbranded coats, improving policies about school shoes to reduce financial pressures on families

Create clear expectations about unbranded coats, improving policies about school shoes to reduce financial pressures on families



Consultation / Family support

Consult parents and pupils on changes to uniform policy

Embed ongoing, meaningful engagement and feedback



Supply and procurement

Prioritise cost, quality, durability; avoid single suppliers

Prioritise cost, quality, durability; avoid exclusive suppliers



Second-hand uniform

Provide accessible second-hand options frequently, reducing stigma where possible

Ensure there is a strong re-use scheme in school and community



Enforcement

A commitment to move away from punishments relating to uniform

There are no sanctions related to not having correct uniform items, providing good quality spares to be borrowed until students can replace



Implementation

Communicate changes clearly and early

Communicate changes clearly and early



Equality and Inclusion

Ensure policies meet cultural, special educational and medical needs

Inclusive and flexible for cultural, special educational and medical needs



Monitoring and review / Co-production

Regularly review with families and pupil feedback, considering staff engagement

Regularly review affordability, access, uptake; gather ongoing feedback, considering staff engagement

Voice of Pupils

Pupil voice is at the heart of this Charter, ensuring children, young people and their families are listened to and that they shape our work through lived experience.

"Uniform is good, it helps us feel like we are part of a community, it just needs to be less expensive."

"It would be good if schools could think about how often and when PE is, so we don't need to buy more than one PE kit."

"Preloved uniform is a good idea, all schools should have it."

"Conversations about uniform could be handled better. It's about how staff talk to you about it. If they do it in a nice respectful way, then its ok."

"Having a charter to further reduce cost is great. My mam is at uni and buying uniform for me is so expensive."

"Thinking about inclusion is important. I'm Muslim so I cover my arms and any way that could be implemented into a uniform policy would be good."

"There doesn't need to be branded uniform, schools could just have a team kit."

"Solutions before sanctions."

"Children shouldn't get into trouble for not having the correct uniform or PE kit."

"School shoes aren't very comfortable. All our uniform needs to be comfortable."

How your school can implement positive changes to support the Charter.



Purpose and principles

- Include affordability, inclusion and sustainability as explicit principles within the uniform policy.
- Ensure all uniform decisions consider cost to families, environmental impact and accessibility for all pupils.
- Link uniform policy to the school's commitment to equity and poverty-aware practice.



Affordability

- Carry out annual affordability assessments before policy changes.
- Publish indicative costs for a full uniform, PE kit and replacement items.
- Compare costs with neighbouring schools and seek family feedback on affordability.



Branded items

- Limit branding to a jumper/cardigan and optional tie or badge.
- Remove branding from PE kits wherever possible.
- Avoid requiring logoed bags, coats, sportswear or accessories.



Generic uniform

- Allow supermarket and high-street alternatives.
- Specify colours and styles rather than brands.
- Accept generic trousers, skirts, shirts, polo shirts, PE shorts and tracksuit bottoms.



Additional items

- Allow any weather-appropriate coat without logos or branding requirements.
- Broaden acceptable footwear options, including plain black trainers.
- Avoid requiring expensive specialist shoes unless justified by health and safety considerations.



Consultation / Family support

- Involve parents, carers, pupils and staff in policy review.
- Use surveys, focus groups and parent forums.
- Ensure families experiencing financial hardship are represented in consultations and decision-making.



Supply and procurement

- Use multiple uniform suppliers where branded items are required.
- Permit parents to purchase branded items from local suppliers, online retailers or school-approved embroidery providers.
- Regularly benchmark prices and quality.
- Avoid sole-supplier arrangements unless exceptional value can be demonstrated.
- Consider active uniform approaches that reduce the need for separate PE kit purchases.



Second-hand uniform

- Operate a well-promoted pre-loved uniform scheme in school.
- Offer regular swap shops and collection events.
- Partner with community hubs, charities, family centres and local organisations to provide year-round access to second-hand uniform.
- Ensure items are clean, high quality and available discreetly where needed.
- Include information on obtaining pre-loved uniform in admission packs and school communications.



Enforcement

- Remove attendance, behaviour or learning sanctions related to affordability issues.
- Maintain a stock of clean uniform items, coats and PE kit that pupils can borrow.
- Use supportive conversations with families rather than punitive approaches.



Implementation

- Give families as much notice as possible of any changes, ideally at least one academic year.
- Clearly explain reasons for changes, expected costs and available support.



Equality and inclusion

- Provide flexibility for religious dress, cultural requirements, sensory needs, disabilities and medical conditions.
- Make reasonable adjustments without creating unnecessary barriers for families.



Monitoring and review/ Co-production

- Review the policy annually, gathering feedback from parents, pupils and staff.
- Monitor affordability, access to second-hand uniform, uptake of support schemes and any concerns raised by families.
- Use findings to inform future improvements.

How you can get involved

Find out more

If you want to be more involved, find out more about how you can be an early adopter or learn more about the benefits of joining our movement contact us today.

✉ enquiries@children-ne.org.uk

Commitment Requirements

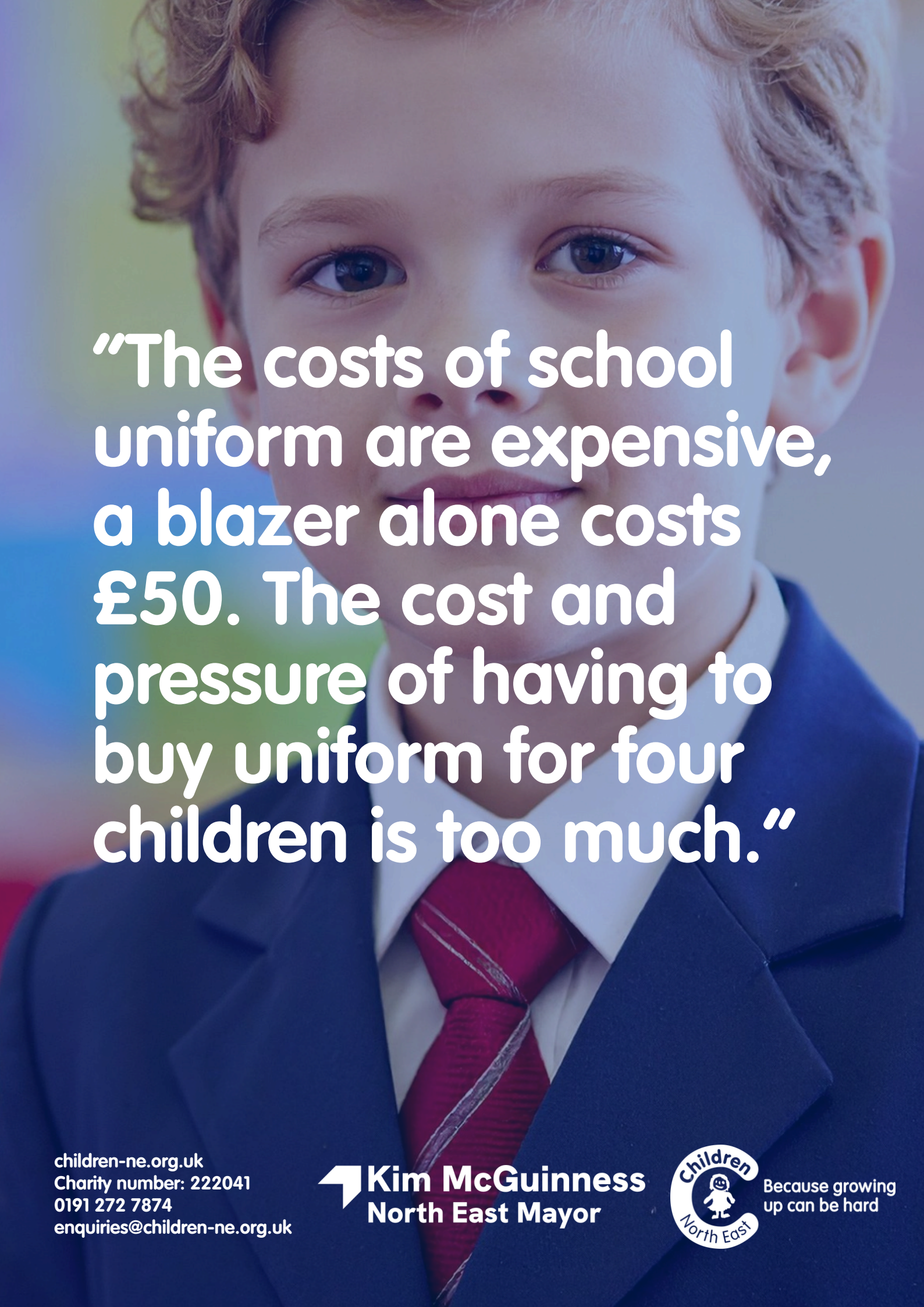
By committing to joining the North East School Uniform Charter, you will be asked to complete an in-school self-assessment and report findings back, as well as share any good practice news.

Sign Up

Visit our webpage to find out how you to sign your school up!

Find out more online





“The costs of school uniform are expensive, a blazer alone costs £50. The cost and pressure of having to buy uniform for four children is too much.”

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