

3 Core Value Rules and Uniform

Every September the UK press finds a story of a ruthless, soul-less dictator of a Headteacher in some part of the country who has enraged the community it serves by sending home children for wearing the wrong shoe/trouser/skirt/haircut. Enraged parent's state how they have forked out/can't fork out triple figure sums of money to clothe their child in an item that school has decided is so bad that they cannot possibly stay in school. How could *School X* place the colour/length/material of the item above the important issue of providing the child with an education? Google will provide you with a dozen or more perfectly interchangeable stories. So how does uniform, and wearing it correctly, affect learning?

It comes back to those core values of being ready, respectful and safe.

Ready. Being ready to work in the work place is a lifelong skill. Accepting that your place of work will require of you to be ready for their (or your own) business is a given requirement; safety boots, hard hats, hi-viz jackets, hair nets, surgical scrubs, jacket and tie, judicial wig, the list is endless and includes some fantastic variation. However, these are choices that workers accept without challenge. Uniform makes for many practical solutions to school environments (classroom and sporting) and creates a purposeful environment, separate to the jeans and t-shirts of the home, non-work environment.

Respectful. This has a big impact. The question that could be asked is, what is worth respecting? Is it the request to sit down? The need to listen to instruction? The need to complete work that a trained teacher deems beneficial to academic progress? The need to wear the uniform as set out by the policy? It's a foundation of respect that makes success more likely. Of course students can all learn well enough on a mufti day in your own clothes but this brings its own impactful issues: cut, colour, right/wrong label, on/off trend, admiration/humiliation. Ask a foreign school student about the clothes they have to wear and they frequently reply that a uniform would be a relief from the judgement of peers for the choices they have to make before leaving the house.

Respect is acceptance without judgement. The most frequently practiced actions become the most intrinsic of habits. Accepting the requirements of the uniform policy, liking them or not, could be good practice for those other requests that are often disregarded: being on time, listening to instructions, and being prepared for next lesson.

Safe. Health and safety is one practical strand but what about mental safety? Adaptations and stylisations of uniform might be a freedom of expression to a few but it frequently becomes a source of stress for many more. Adaptations are rarely individual expressions but group expectations. The same type of trainer, brand of trainer, black but fashionably short skirt and specifically coloured hooped ear-ring/nose stud become underground obsessions. FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) is a major contributor to adolescent mental health concern. Social media naming and shaming (cyber bullying) for those not fitting in is another. Students have always followed fashion, but the retribution for not doing so is now 24/7 via social media as well as face to face. Truly uniform Uniform can remove differences of taste/income and give a mental safety to students who are free to be themselves without pressure. Mental health and safety is, today, frequently more important than physical health and safety, however uniform policies also need to adhere to those practicalities as well.