

# Observing the Everyday: School Uniform

By Florence Gidney



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After walking back from my lecture it was hard not to notice the repetitive sight of school children. Monotonous and mundane, tartan and grey, like a swarm of copies throughout new cross. The design of the uniform sparked memories of Pink Floyd's music video for 'Just another brick in the wall', coercing children into conformation. The only positive personal association I found connected to uniform was for St Trinians, where the uniform proposed individuality and unity. Whilst its' fictionality deters from its legitimacy as a reference, the notion is arguably a step in the right direction for the future of uniform design.

School uniform encourages conformity, a notion further enforced with all individuals being taken through the same syllabus, aimed at the same set of numbers, translating merit to numeric. In spite of this, student are encouraged to 'think outside of the box' they were inevitably put in by the quantitative nature of the education system. Our school system has unintentionally been designed to discourage individuality, a characteristic ironically desired by future employers.

Uniform is okay for some, preventing unnecessary attention on attire, however the regimented enforcement of these rules can be problematic for others. Haircuts are an issue for ADHD students,

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<sup>1</sup> Image by Alix Gidney (2010)

yet regulations provide little lenience. Given gender is considered on a scale as opposed to a generic male or female identity, uniform creates issues for those identifying somewhere in between, traditionally adhering to only girls and boys separately. Fortunately, gender neutral options are increasingly available, a considerable step towards an over due, fresh approach to school uniform.

On the whole, one size does not fit all; the treatment of students as a collective creates issues for those who don't conform. Furthermore, double standards are perpetuated by the design of uniforms. Where boys' attire is considered either smart or messy, girls uniforms have been sexualised leading to the scale being drawn between smart or provocative. A highly prevalent issue with uniform regards the price, an issue I vividly remember my parents ranting about. With a single set, including a shirt, tights, sock, shoes, trousers or a skirt being priced above £30, uniform is not readily accessible to all.

The zero tolerance approach to imperfections taken on by schools regarding appearance is where my main issue lies. Thomas Curran, a Ted lecturer, 'explores how the pressure to be perfect -- in our social media feeds, in school, at work -- is driving a rise in mental illness, especially among young people'<sup>2</sup>. With strict uniform regulations constantly reminding students individualism is not rewarded, schools perpetuate perfectionist standards through the attire.

I respect the positives, considering how uniforms level the playing field regarding children's backgrounds. Some appreciate not having to decide on appearances, however to say it reduces distractions is misleading. Students are regularly sent home for incorrect uniform which is considerably more of a deterrent from learning than home chosen attires. Schools' zero tolerance approach creates opposition and contention between student and teacher where uniform is used as an 'instrument of control'<sup>3</sup>. Uniform impacts the learning environment, giving students material for rebellion.

In conclusion, revamping schools' approach to uniform is in order. Whilst totally abolishing them may not be the answer, a readdressing of the design may help to change individuals association and interaction with it for the better.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/thomas\\_curran\\_our\\_dangerous\\_obsession\\_with\\_perfectionism\\_is\\_getting\\_worse](https://www.ted.com/talks/thomas_curran_our_dangerous_obsession_with_perfectionism_is_getting_worse)

<sup>3</sup> <https://inews.co.uk/news/education/school-uniforms-battleground-585392>