

I'm not trying to cause trouble

"Maggie. I need to speak to you before you go, please."

Miss Ahuja neatens the pile of exercise books on her desk while Maggie packs her pencil case back in her bag.

"Yes Miss?"

Maggie stands to the side of Miss Ahuja's desk and looks intently at the pile of books.

"You know what I'm going to say Maggie, don't you?"

Maggie sighs. "Yes Miss."

'That jumper is not part of our school uniform.'

"No, Miss."

"Our uniform rules are very clear Maggie. I need to see you in proper uniform tomorrow otherwise I will have no option but to take this further. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Miss."

"Off you go to your next lesson then Maggie. You don't want to be late."

Maggie takes a deep breath as she leaves the classroom. Her next lesson is upstairs in the same building. The corridors are still busy. She hoists her bag onto her back, puts her head down and keeping as close to the left-hand wall as she can, approaches the stairs.

"Maggie!"

It is Mr Jones, her head of year.

"Where is your school jumper?"

Maggie stops and looks at the floor.

"I don't want to have to speak to you again young lady! This is the second time this week that you have not been in proper uniform. Let there not be a third strike please. I know our uniform is not the height of fashion and it isn't as comfortable as your favourite hoodie, but rules are rules. Off you go then, don't be late!"

By now the corridor is quieter and Maggie hurries up the stairs.

The next day Maggie is sitting in her seat in Miss Ahuja's class.

"It is good to see you in proper uniform Maggie. Thank you."

Maggie squirms in her seat and opens her book. She pulls the cuffs of her uniform jumper over her knuckles and rests her hand in her lap.

Another day of school, another day of getting told off for my uniform.

I haven't been wearing my school jumper for a while now as it makes me so uncomfortable. The textures and fit just don't sit right with me and distract me away from my work.

Recently, I've been wearing a plain black jumper instead, one that's softer and slightly bigger so I'm comfortable. In my comfy jumper, I find it so much easier to concentrate and get a lot more work done! I struggle with sensory issues a lot as certain textures and feelings especially can cause me to get upset and end with me doing no work.

It's 2pm and I've already been told off 4 times today for wearing a different jumper. I've tried to explain how I feel but no one seems to understand and just thinks I'm trying to dodge the school rules for no reason! I wish people listened and understood I'm not trying to cause trouble and just want to feel comfortable within school. The head of year shouted at me yesterday and said I'm on my last chance so tomorrow I'm going to have to wear the school jumper.

The next day:

I can't concentrate. I haven't done nearly enough work and are starting to get worried about catching up. Teachers keep on congratulating me for wearing my uniform like it's a miracle, when really, it's a nightmare for me.

I'm currently sat in English, I'm meant to have written a full page but instead all I can think about is how much I hate the texture of this jumper. It almost physically hurts, I can't stop focusing on it and how horrible the jumper feels around me. I'm scared this is going to get me into even more trouble for not doing work and it's making me feel really anxious and overwhelmed.

I understand a lot of students might just not want to wear a uniform, but sensory issues are a valid reason. This is something that definitely deserves to be listened to and could even be an indication towards a bigger struggle.

Questions/Talking points

1. What is the point of a school uniform? What are the barriers to making it more flexible?
2. What might the impact be on a young person getting told off for the same thing many times in one day?
3. How do you think Maggie felt being congratulated for doing something that she knew was detrimental to her learning?
4. What could the teachers have done differently that would have helped them to better understand Maggie's needs?