

Will a £229 leather dress get top marks for M&S?

MADE entirely from leather with a daring split, it doesn't seem like the most practical choice for the office.

But this dress is the latest spring offering from Marks & Spencer – and one which the store hopes will reverse its flagging clothing sales.

At a preview of the chain's spring/summer 2016 collections yesterday, fashion journalists pointed out the £229 leather dress as one to watch.

It comes after a brown suede skirt – costing £199 – quickly sold out in M&S stores earlier this year after being spotted on celebrities from TV presenter Alexa Chung to American socialite Olivia Palermo. The frenzy

By **Claire Coleman**

prompted rumours of a 3,500-strong waiting list of customers eager to snap it up when it came back into stock, as well as the creation of a more affordable suedette version.

However, despite the skirt's success, recent figures show the store's fashion business still appears to be losing ground to High Street rivals including John Lewis, Next and Primark. It was announced last week that M&S clothing and homeware sales fell 1.9 per cent in three months – although its food business continued to do well.

Yesterday's preview was a chance

for M&S style director Belinda Earl to showcase her latest collections to the international fashion press.

Leather and suede featured heavily – from a mid-length suede coat costing £299, to a calf-grazing leather wrap skirt at £199, and even wide-leg leather trousers, also costing £199.

Mrs Earl joined the company's fashion business in autumn 2012, hoping to rescue its reputation.

She said: 'Leather is a really high-performing category for us.'

'But we want the silhouettes to be available at all price points, so things like the leather wrap skirt will also be available in satin for £55.'

By **Steve Doughty**
Social Affairs Correspondent

WHITE British pupils are now less likely to go to university than those from other ethnic groups, a report said yesterday.

It also found white teenagers have been overtaken by ethnic minorities in the race to win places at top higher education institutions.

The findings, described by one researcher as 'staggering', showed that a lower proportion of white British pupils now go to university than their counterparts from minority groups – who have long been considered to suffer a disadvantage.

For example, Bangladeshi children living in the UK have a 50 per cent higher chance on average of a university education than white British pupils, the researchers said.

The project, carried out by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, lays bare the decline of educational achievement among white British children compared with other groups. It follows years of anxiety among politicians and

'The differences are staggering'

the education establishment over the comparatively poor performance of white British boys in schools.

The IFS researchers said they found little difference in the rate of university admissions between white British boys and girls. But they wrote: 'All ethnic minority groups are now, on average, more likely to go to university than their white British peers.'

After examining university entrance records and 2011 census findings, the researchers said that just under a third of those who class themselves as white British go to university – 32.6 per cent. Black Caribbean youngsters have a 37.4 per cent chance of higher education, Pakistani pupils a 44.7 per cent chance, and the figure for Bangladeshis is 48.8 per cent.

Indian youngsters have more than double the chance of going to university than white Britons, with 67.4 per cent entering higher education. At the top of the table are Chinese pupils, of whom more than three quarters – 75.4

White pupils fall behind ethnic groups in race for university

per cent – go to university. The researchers also picked out 52 of the most selective institutions, and found pupils from most ethnic minority groups were more likely than white British teenagers to win places.

The report, paid for by the Departments for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, did not examine the perceived stronger work ethic among immigrant families – who have often pulled themselves up from economic hardship.

Among the least well-off white Britons – those in the bottom fifth of the income scale – only just over one in eight pupils go to university. Youngsters from the poorest Chinese families are five times more likely to go into higher education, the study said.

Dr Claire Crawford, assistant professor of economics at the University of

Warwick, and one of the authors of the report, said: 'The differences in higher education participation between pupils from different ethnic groups are staggering. We were particularly surprised to find that ethnic minority groups which have relatively low school attainment – such as those of black Caribbean, Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic origin – are, on average, more likely to continue into higher education than white British pupils.'

The report said school performance did not appear to dictate which pupils went to university. It suggested non-white families may work harder to get children into higher education, adding: 'There must be other factors that are more common among ethnic minority families than among white British families which are positively associated with university participation.'



Daring: A leather dress from the new M&S spring collection

Open plan living goes out of style – thanks to iPads

OPEN plan homes were once the height of sophistication, with the layout creating the illusion of more space.

But according to a top architect, the rise of technology means walls are coming back into fashion.

Mary Duggan, a judge for the RIBA House of the Year award, said the increasing use of iPads and other mobile devices has changed the way we want to live – with families now hankering after a 'broken plan' layout instead.

This means a house which has separate spaces such as snugs and TV rooms, where family members can escape to watch their favour-

By **Jemma Buckley**

ite programmes alone. Miss Duggan said: 'The world of the open-plan family room has changed quite significantly. We're getting asked more for snugs, rooms with TVs or a space where people can go and watch something on their iPad independently.'

However, she said there was still demand for open plan kitchen and living areas, which remain popular for entertaining guests.

The RIBA House of the Year award will be shown on Channel 4 for the first time as part of popular programme Grand Designs.



Big spender: Nigella Lawson

Nigella's breakfast bars that cost a small fortune

SHE made her name as the queen of everyday comfort food – but Nigella Lawson seems determined to place herself among the foodie big spenders with her latest show.

The breakfast bars she made on Monday's Simply Nigella cost nearly seven times the price of the supermarket variety.

With ingredients including gluten-free cornflakes, goji berries, chia seeds, flax seeds and cocoa nibs, her 'Breakfast Bars 2.0' cost 78p each to make, compared with the 12p price breakfast bars can be bought for in the shops.

As she mixed her bowl of seeds with medjool dates – which sell for

By **Sam Creighton**
TV and Radio Reporter

£12 per kilogram – viewers could not help but point out that her expectations of them might not quite match with their abilities, let alone their bank balances. One posted on Twitter: 'Chia seeds? Goji berries?! Cost of Nigella's breakfast bars = £463 per serving.'

To make the batch of 16 listed in the cookbook Miss Lawson has released with the series, you would need produce worth £12.54. However, each bar is modest in size, meaning more than one might be needed for a filling breakfast.