

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools

Princes Hill Secondary College—31 July 2007

Members

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Ms H. Stokes, school council president,

Ms M. Pledger, parent association representative, and

Miss K. Abay, Miss E. Dunphy, Miss M. Halloran-Mackay, Mr W. Kavanagh-Ryan, Miss T. Morgan, Miss M. Wilson, students, Princes Hill Secondary College;

Ms G. Lofhelm, assistant principal, and

Miss B. Nielsen-Tuck, Miss A. Kron, students, Princes Hill Primary School;

Ms V. Fleming, Mr C. Atkins, Mr A. Dowsett, Mr D. Leach, Miss E. McAulay, Mr A. Nesser, Mr J. Nicholas, Mr M. Resic, other participants.

The CHAIR—Welcome everybody to the Education and Training Committee inquiry. I would like to explain a little bit about the committee. Bernie and I are members of parliament. There are in fact seven members of parliament on our committee from three political parties—the National Party, the Liberal Party and the Labor Party—from upper and lower house. The parliamentary committee is set up at the start of a parliamentary term, and references will come to us from ministries, from the upper house and from a different range of areas. We carry out an inquiry into the issues that have been referred to us, then we present a report at the end of that time that will go to the government and the government will consider that report. They might decide to do everything we suggest in the report, they might decide to do nothing we suggest in the report, or they may take some of the ideas in the report and act on those. That is a rough outline of the committee.

The hearing today is one of the first we have done out at a school in regard to the school uniform and dress code inquiry, so it is great to be at Princes Hill this afternoon. Thank you for the invitation to come to Princes Hill. We all have microphones in front of us so that the information is taken down. The evidence taken down at the inquiry today is subject to parliamentary privilege. That means that action is not able to be taken against people in relation to things that are said, and that relates to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act. But the information that you share with us is recorded and can be made public, after people have had a chance to correct anything that they might want to have corrected, and then is weighed up into the inquiry. That is an explanation of who we are.

Another member of parliament was here earlier, but he has had to go to a hospital emergency, so there are just the two members of parliament, but Karen Ellingford, who looks after our committee, is here to support us, as are Jennifer and Andrew. We are going to try and keep it reasonably informal, but I will invite some of the people who are listed here on my sheet—some of you around the table—to speak to us for a few minutes and share your views and then we are going to ask some questions of you and open it up for further discussion from there. John, I am going to ask you first of all to open up and introduce us to your views in regard to school uniforms and then we will move on from there.

Mr GOODMAN—Thanks. I would like to welcome the committee formally here on behalf of the school. It is great to have you here. My enthusiasm for this is because it was an issue that was so strongly felt about by our school community. There were such strong ideas and sentiments about it, that it is great to have you here. I also have another agenda: it is a fantastic civics learning opportunity for our students, so it is fantastic to have the primary school students here, for that reason. Welcome, and thank you for coming.

I would like to highlight a few of the key points that I made in my submission to the committee. What we really value here at the school is diversity. That is one of the values of our school community. I think that our school uniform-free policy really gives expression to that sense of diversity. Members of the committee have had a bit of an opportunity to have a look around the school and will have observed that some members of our school community really enjoy the sense of experimentation that comes with our uniform-free policy. For other members of our school community here, it is another thing that they do not really have to worry about. I think that the fantastic thing that is really valued, by students certainly, is that sense of being able to choose.

When we canvassed responses from parents, one of the significant things that was raised consistently was that sense of the slightly democratic culture of the college—by not having a school uniform, there is that freedom of choice which is entirely consistent with the values of a democratic and free society—which I think is a significant point to raise as well. We encourage students here at the college to participate and have a voice through our student forums, and I think that our uniform policy is consistent with that also.

Staff responses focused on a few things that were significant, the main one being that they did not have to spend an inordinate amount of time implementing and enforcing a rule—that is, a uniform policy—that they did not believe in. Staff here believe very strongly in the importance of our uniform-free culture and they felt that having something like a uniform would just be unnecessary time used following up on a policy that really has nothing to do with the culture of the school.

The other thing that emerged really strongly as I asked questions of the school community was that our uniform policy is, for us, as emblematic of our school culture as a uniform would be for another school—that is, by not having a uniform we are able to give expression to the values of diversity and creativity that are fundamental values of the school, in much the same way as a school which has a uniform with a crest and a

motto that is representative of their school values.

The overwhelming sense that I got when I started to compile the paper was the enthusiasm for the school's uniform-free policy; the fact that there is no other way really to approach this question at this school because it is so embedded in the culture of the school and in the students' freedom to choose. I started my submission with a bit of a historical reference to a time when we did have uniforms here at the college, and there was a little bit of a rebellion from the student body, deciding that they wanted to go against that particular policy. I think that that emphasises the fact that for this school community it has been an almost organic process of just evolution away from it and it is a very natural situation we have here in having a uniform-free policy.

To summarise the main things that I think I raised in the paper, our uniform-free policy is really about us giving expression to our values. It has not even been made that much of a big deal of. It is just intrinsic to the culture of the school, and it would really for us be inconceivable, I think, to have any other approach to uniform or, should I say, not having a uniform.

The CHAIR—Thanks, John. We will come back to some questions later on, but I might move on to Helen, as the school council president, and then to Margie. Then we will hear from some of the students. Would you like to add your perspective, Helen.

Ms STOKES—It is interesting hearing John talk and the things that he mentioned. One of the things the school council did a couple of years ago was develop the school values. There are five of them, two of which are creativity and diversity. You often feel that they maybe stay within the school council or within the administration and do not go out into the school and what the students and parents think, but you try and develop them from what is actually happening in the school.

With this focus on uniform-free, it has been one way that we have seen that the students really do take up what the values of the school are, and that is part of their way of thinking. It is one way that they can express diversity and one way that they can express creativity—through not having a uniform and being able to dress as they please. That, for us, is important, and we are able to see that the way the school council is going is also in line with what the students are thinking and what the school community is thinking.

As far as the school council goes, we very strongly support not having a uniform at the school. In the past there have been moves, even through student forum, to have some sort of school dress. That has been allowed to go through student forum, talked about and discussed. There was even a design done. The students had to come forward and want to buy some of those uniforms—well, it was called 'school dress'. None of them wanted to do that in the end, and so it did not happen. It did not go ahead, because there was a sense that they could choose whether they wanted to have a uniform or not and they chose not to, even though there was a design put forward by some of the students.

School council has always supported the way that students want to go with that, and that has been strongly not to have any sort of school dress but to allow the students to wear what they choose, within the realms of what is considered safe within the school.

The CHAIR—We will go to Margie now for your view.

Ms PLEDGER—I am representing the parents of the school, so it is a collective view. John's submission has already voiced quite extensively the feelings of the parents at the school, but I thought I would survey the parents that have been coming to our forums. I got a great response, I have to say. I do not think I have had a response as encouraging as the number of people who replied to me. I have summarised here what they have had to say, so I am going to go through that. I was asked to speak on the effect that our current dress code has in terms of convenience, cost and child wellbeing, so that is what I have focused my comments on.

In terms of convenience, the current dress code is easy to conform to, as clothes can be purchased from any general clothing source. It allows students who are not standard sizes to be easily catered for, because they can get clothes from a variety of different places. It allows students who wish to, to minimise any particular aspect of their appearance which might make them feel vulnerable, because they can choose garments of any cut or colour that they feel suits them. I had some parents letting me know that it certainly made for calmer busy

mornings when parents and students are unable to find regulation garments as required under a uniform policy. It also meant that a lost garment would not result in infraction of a uniform until it was replaced.

In terms of cost—and I will have three kids at the school next year and this certainly applies to me—it is one less source of financial stress for parents, particularly around Christmas and holiday time when you are already paying for enrolment fees and purchasing books. Not having that added impost of uniforms for three kids is a significant positive, I can tell you. Our current dress code is very cost effective. You can wear the same range of clothes. Because you have to buy casual clothes anyway for weekends and holidays—and I presume the majority of kids do not wear their uniforms out of school—the same range of clothes can be worn all week and, given that adolescents are quite often growing, it means you get the maximum amount of use from those clothes in the time that they fit the kids, so that is a big savings as well.

You can see from the kids here that the clothing style is quite low key. Would you agree with me that it is reasonably low key? It means that parents and kids can source their clothes according to whatever their budget allows for. We have kids who shop at op shops, quite proudly so, and it pretty much caters for anybody's budget. It means that when parents are spending money on clothes, they are buying clothes that they know their kids are going to enjoy wearing and therefore will wear, without too much of a problem. I would have to say that the majority of responses were focused on issues of student wellbeing, very much as John has talked about already. Our current dress code means that students feel respected. It allows them to express their personalities, wear what is comfortable and meaningful to them, and experiment with their appearance at a time when their development calls for this.

It promotes the development of personal responsibility because students choose what they wear, rather than have a uniform enforced upon them; contributes to the creative space necessary for children to develop to their full potential; contributes to an atmosphere at Princes Hill where both conformist and non-conformist kids can thrive; treats students fairly and equitably, rather than imposing a double standard whereby students must wear a uniform while those with the right to enforce it do not; promotes respect for diversity, in that everyone can be different but equal; allows students to reflect their culture in what they wear, whether that is a requirement of their culture or their choice to express that; makes for a less oppressive school experience, as it confines rules to those necessary to ensure a good academic and social education and a fair and cooperative school community. Many parents commented that having a dress code as opposed to a uniform allows teacher-student relationships to remain positively focused, rather than being focused on student conformity with uniform regulations which many parents see as a valuable waste of both teacher and student time and energy.

Finally, the current dress code does seem to eliminate a source of conflict between parents and students. Peer group pressure is sometimes commented on. I want to quote one of the parents who put it in rather a lovely way: 'At weekends, in workplaces out of school, the majority of people choose the clothes they wear, choose the image of themselves they want to present to the world. This is a regular everyday occurrence, a life skill. Dealing with peer pressure is also a necessary part of adolescent life, and choosing clothes is just one of the many ways peers can try to influence each other. Let's not pretend that a uniform will in any way diminish peer pressure. Learning to choose what they wear each day is another opportunity for parents to monitor how their children are coping with peer pressure; issues to be faced not avoided by making everyone wear the same uniform.' Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thank you for going to that trouble of surveying your other parents and putting that together. We might hear from you before we ask some general questions in regard to Princes Hill Secondary, and then we will come to Princes Hill Primary after that and get their view. Who is going to speak first? We will start with Maille and work along.

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—As a student of Princes Hill Secondary, I would like to present my experience of being in a school with a no-uniform policy and my views on why this is a successful policy. The purpose of a school uniform, as I understand it, is to make every student in the school seem equal by dressing each student in the same way. A uniform is supposed to hide the differences between students, but the clothing that we may choose to wear can display our individuality as well as our opinions. We can wear clothing to support a sports team or a slogan T-shirt that says 'No war'. Students who wish to wear religious items of clothing or display clothing of their subcultures are deprived of their freedom of expression when a

uniform is enforced. Some people feel more comfortable with a silent way of expression rather than speaking out. By denying us the freedom to wear these clothes, we are denied the chance to express ourselves in a way that we feel comfortable.

Experimenting with self-image is a part of maturing and growing up. Allowing young people to wear clothes of their own choice allows them to take responsibility for their own comfort, appearance and self-esteem. Schools that have enforced a uniform say that a uniform encourages these things: equal opportunity, anti-discrimination, order in the school and anti-bullying. Equal opportunity is encouraged in schools with no uniform also. Here at Princes Hill Secondary we promote equal opportunity: what you wear has no influence on your opportunities in our school. To encourage anti-discrimination is important, but how can wearing a uniform encourage anti-discrimination? As I mentioned previously, a school uniform means students of certain religions, for example, who wear cultural items of clothing such as headdresses, cannot wear these at school.

Isn't this a form of discrimination? A student displaying cultural items of clothing in a school exposes the other students to cultural diversity. Schools say a uniform promotes order in the school. Schools with a strict dress code and uniform give the impression that they have a strong disciplinary system, but all schools put as much energy into applying a strong code of conduct, and lack of uniform does not mean that student conduct is any worse than in a uniformed school. It also does not mean that the school's dress code has no restrictions at all. Here at Princes Hill our dress code is sensible. No offensive clothing is allowed and appropriate footwear must be worn.

Because of Princes Hill's no-uniform policy, the environment is relaxed and colourful. There is no competitiveness about who wears the most expensive or fashionable clothes. Having a uniform is said to encourage no bullying. The argument is that students who are poor cannot afford to buy expensive clothes and may get bullied because of it. If this is true, it is the school's responsibility to enforce a stronger policy on no bullying. The same amount of bullying goes on at schools with a uniform. Students can get picked on for the quality of their uniform, if they bought it second-hand, or just the way they wear it. Bullying has nothing to do with whether the school has a uniform or not.

Individuality and creativity are important qualities in youth. The way we dress is one of the ways we channel this individuality and creativity. Allowing students to dress freely is allowing us to express ourselves and experiment with self-image and identity, which can make our time at school more enjoyable and relaxed. Thanks.

The CHAIR—Thank you, William.

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—School uniforms are supposed to erase visible social differences between people attending a school, but I think that when most people think of school uniforms they think of private schools. Private schools do not use their uniforms to erase social differences. They use them to show that the differences exist. They say, 'We belong together; others don't belong.' People talk about wearing the 'old school tie' to show that they can use the influence of excluding others unfairly to their own advantage. Is this something that we are trying to promote? Is there anything more undemocratic? Or are we saying that our policy should be to make the situation more democratic by making it compulsory for all public schools statewide to wear a single uniform?

Will we also be looking for all state schools which receive state funding to be obliged to wear the same uniform? Should the state government also be able to say how the uniform should look if they provide funding with it? Would the requirements for state schools which receive all state funding be applied to private schools which receive state funding as well? Are we all going to be equal? Are private schools going to be more equal? When should we start applying the uniform rules—in primary school, in pre-school, or should we start applying them in kindergarten? When do we stop applying the uniform rules? Should people in university wear one? If not, why not? What makes them so different? They get government money. A person can get married at 16 when they could still be in high school. Are we saying that someone could be trusted to choose who they want to spend the rest of their life with but cannot be trusted to choose which jumper to wear?

If wearing a school uniform was applied to all state schools, how would it affect the people who would have

to buy them? For people who are poor, they would need to spend money on uniforms for their children. That might include two summer uniforms and two winter uniforms. That could be up to 12 pieces of clothing per child. For some people, that would mean they would have to buy twice as much clothing as they buy at the moment, with one lot that could only be worn at school. What would happen to a family with a couple of children? It could cost a lot of money and poor families would struggle. Would they be provided with their uniforms for free? If they were, someone would probably find out in the end and they would be shown to be poor in front of all their friends. The purpose of a uniform, which is to make everyone equal, would be gone. Poor children would be humiliated.

I chose to come to Princes Hill Secondary College for lots of reasons. One of the reasons was because the school has no uniform. I see that the uniform steals from children the opportunity to express themselves through the way they dress. Growing up includes children experimenting, making mistakes and learning from those mistakes. We might choose to make friends because we see that the way somebody dresses means they think in a certain way and then find out that we do not really like them. We might see the way that someone is dressed and think that they are not someone we would like and then we discover we were wrong.

Taking away our right to dress as we like is like taking away one of our freedoms to experiment and learn to be ourselves at a time in our lives when making a mistake is not too important. When we are at school, we already know there are rules we have to follow. I think wearing a uniform in school is like putting a dog on a leash in an area where he or she can run free. It is unfair and unjust for every one of us. Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thank you, William. Thea.

Miss WILSON—Good afternoon. I am Mia and this is Thea. We are together.

The CHAIR—Mia and Thea together?

Miss MORGAN—We believe that uniforms are very expensive and unattractive. If our school was to get a uniform, some families may not like this and even take their children away and into another school. What is the point of a uniform? All it does is make everyone look the same. Our school would not suit a uniform, especially the students who like to express their personalities in what they wear and how they do their hair.

Miss WILSON—I came to Princes Hill Secondary College because I thought that everyone looked happy learning in an environment where you could wear casual clothes. It just gives me a picture of students and teachers expressing their personalities by the way that they dress. Students seem much happier in this type of environment.

Miss MORGAN—We asked the students in our class what they thought of a uniform.

Miss WILSON—Out of all 23 kids in our whole class, not a single one of them said yes to uniform.

Miss MORGAN—Plus, if teachers can dress casually, why can't we?

Miss WILSON—We also asked our friends what they thought and they tended to say such things as, 'Uniforms suck,' and, 'We hate uniforms.' Why then do so many schools have a uniform? Casual dress allows all students to appreciate other students' differences.

Miss MORGAN—Some schools only have a sports uniform, and 10 of our classmates agreed that this would be a good idea.

Miss WILSON—A sports uniform would be good, as when it comes to interschool sports we would not have to wear the old heaps-of-times-worn-before-now clothes the school provides.

Miss MORGAN—Instead, we could have our own sports uniform consisting of shorts and a T-shirt in our school colours in summer and the same T-shirt and our new trackies or the same shorts in winter. We could also wear these for PE and sport.

Miss WILSON—We are not saying that the school does not need a dress code, as it already does and it is a good one at that. We are just saying no to school uniform.

Miss MORGAN—If our school had a uniform, what about the students with religious beliefs? Muslim girls may not be able to wear their headdress or Christians and Catholics would not be able to wear a crucifix cross due to jewellery and accessories being banned. If our school had to have a uniform, it should be something casual like a polo shirt with the school logo and jeans.

Miss WILSON—Even then, the student body would most likely not be happy.

Miss MORGAN—If there was a school uniform, this would be unfair on the students, especially when there are teachers walking around casually dressed.

Miss WILSON—We can safely say that students would not be happy if we had to wear a school uniform every day weekly.

Miss MORGAN—School uniforms are unattractive and unnecessary. Thank you.

Miss WILSON—Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thank you. I think you have made your point clear. We might, in fact, go onto Princes Hill Primary School and then we will come back to questions across the board, if you are happy about that, Bernie and everybody. Gayle, isn't it?

Ms LOFHELM—Yes.

The CHAIR—We would love to hear from you and then from Bridget and Alessa.

Ms LOFHELM—The question I was asked to address was our current dress code. We have uniform items which are optional for parents to buy and optional for children to wear, and very few children wear the items. The only compulsory item is the wearing of broad-brimmed or legionnaires hats in terms 1 and 4 by both staff and children when they are outside, participating in any outdoor activities. Narrow-strapped items of clothing and singlet tops are banned, as these do not give adequate protection of the shoulders and upper body. Children are to wear flat shoes and comfortable clothes. For interschool sport, district or zone sporting events, Princes Hill Primary School has sporting tops for the children to wear. These were purchased from phys ed grants the school has received over the last few years, to give a sense of team identity in sporting engagements. Our children wear very comfortable clothing—for example, jeans, T-shirts and sweat tops.

I was also asked to address how it affects the classroom environment in terms of student learning, teaching approaches, behaviour and teacher-student relationships. At Princes Hill there is a good rapport between staff and children. Lack of uniform creates no behaviour issues. Staff, both teaching and admin, do not waste time enforcing breaches of the uniform. Children are not competitive about what they wear. Their clothes can reflect their personalities. Some of our children even feel very comfortable wearing dress-ups to school and come along like that. Children show their individuality through their clothes, so we do not have items of clothing such as over-the-top jewellery being worn to make the wearer stand out. A strong sense of belonging applies to all members of the school community, with full acceptance of the diversity and individuality of everyone's dress—for example, cultural dress requirements of a few students. Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Gayle. Who is going to speak first? Bridget?

Miss NIELSEN-TUCK—Yes. I am Bridget and I am one of the presidents of the junior school council at Princes Hill Primary. I like to wear jeans and any shirt to school because they are comfortable and I like how they look. I also like accessories like scarves and beanies. I would not mind if the school decided to make a new uniform, as long as the students had a say in the design. I think some uniforms can be very practical and help make it less hectic in the mornings when we are getting ready for school.

Now I would like to share with you some of the comments from my peers who would like to wear a uniform. They said it would be easier to wear a uniform because they would not have to worry about what they wore. They suggested that once a week we could wear casual clothes for a day to loosen it up so that kids can still express their personalities through their clothes. They also said that there would not be as much peer pressure about what we wore because we would all be wearing the same things. In addition, uniforms show pride in the school and, when going out on public occasions, they would help identify our group. Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Alessa.

Miss KRON—I am Alessa and I am a vice-president of the junior school council at Princes Hill Primary School. I personally like to wear comfy and easy to wear clothes to school every day. Why? Well, I need to wear clothes that are hassle free because I really do not have time to spare in the morning. I would not mind going to a school with a uniform, as long as the uniform was practical and it did not cost too much. I will be representing my peers at Princes Hill who do not want to wear a uniform. Here are some of their thoughts: uniforms do not show individuality and you do not get to show others your personality through what you wear. Depending on what sort of uniform you have to wear, it can be impractical and uncomfortable, and you may even be allergic to some of the materials that the uniform is made with. The uniform might not suit you, especially if it has ugly shoes. Uniforms can be very expensive, and usually you need to buy multiple sets; therefore, your parents may not be happy to buy you as many casual clothes. Also, if the uniform policy is strict, it can cause stress amongst students and parents alike. On behalf of Princes Hill Primary, Bridget and I would like to thank you for listening to our students' opinions.

The CHAIR—Thank you, Alessa. I did not ask you before, Kez, whether you wanted to say anything up-front or are you happy to answer questions?

Miss ABAY—No. I am not in the forum at school but I am just a plain out student at Princes Hill. Listening to the year 7s, they have come from their primary schools where they did not wear a uniform and they have come to this school. I am in year 9, so I have been here for three years. When I walk through the corridors, I look at what the children are wearing and they are just so bright, and everyone expresses themselves so much. When I do look at them, we never judge each other. Sometimes I might not even know the person but I might say, 'Hey, that looks really good,' and that brings a relationship between everyone. There are rich and poor at this school; you honestly do not see the difference. I know some really wealthy people at this school that would not choose to shop on Collins Street, Gucci and everything; they would choose to shop at op shops because we have shown that in our school.

When we walk down the street, I do see people in their uniforms but then I see them as an MGC or an MLC and that is it. I would like to have more of an opinion on them. I could ask them, 'How are you?' and get to know them. If they are wearing basketball shoes, it would be like, 'Oh, I have an interest in them.' I play basketball. When you have no uniform you read people so well and, yes, you make friends and it is just comfortable. It is a good school to be in because everyone at this school does feel comfortable with each other. There are some people that get up in the morning and get so worried about what they are going to wear, but in the end when you get to school everyone does look the same but if you look at them carefully you can read so much about them. I love it here with no uniform, so I would not want you to bring it in.

The CHAIR—Okay, thanks. It is good to have some other people out there. We will give you a chance a little later. We might ask some questions now and then if any of you in the audience would like to put some views, that would be okay, too. Bernie, have you got some questions?

Mr FINN—I have got a couple of questions, Mr Chairman; indeed, I do. Firstly to John: I was interested to hear you say that the no uniform really is a mark of this school. Are you using this as a marketing exercise?

Mr GOODMAN—No, I would say not actually. It is much more intrinsic than that and I do not think it is something that we promote about the school. It is more something that is just known and is recognised as something very representative of the culture of the school. Certainly we would not put out materials or information to prospective parents, and we do not promote it widely on the internet. There is a section on our internet about our dress code and it is fairly minimal guidelines. But, no, it tends not to be something that we

go out and make a big promotion of. It is more something that I think is understood as being significant and part of the culture of the school. Parents understand it, students understand it; certainly the staff celebrate it and believe in it. It is not so much something that we promote but something that we certainly see as representative in a kind of quiet way.

Mr FINN—Do you think you have actually lost students at your school, as in students have not come here because of that culture and the lack of uniform, because some parents, as you are aware, have strong views about these sorts of things.

Mr GOODMAN—I do not think so. I think a parent who would look at a school and say, 'It must have a uniform,' probably would not be looking our way in the first place. Most parents who are looking at us and thinking about the values that we represent, the kind of academic and school culture that their children would be exposed to here, would see the uniform policy as being completely consistent with that. I suspect that, if they were really looking for a uniform-wearing school, they probably would not be looking our way.

The CHAIR—In terms of the students that come to Princes Hill, how many of them would live locally and how many of them would come from a distance, past other schools perhaps, on their way here?

Ms STOKES—There would be 30 per cent from in area, and the rest are from out of area. It is 30:70.

Mr FINN—How far out of area do you think?

Ms STOKES—It changes as the years go by, because the school gets more popular as the years go and so the area that links out is shrinking. There would be in the past kids from Epping, north, south, all around, but that gets less as the years go with the pressure on enrolments.

Ms PLEDGER—The parents who responded to me said they would not be sending their kids to Princes Hill—they were quite adamant about that—if we did introduce a uniform policy.

Ms STOKES—So the loss would be the other way.

Mr FINN—Yes.

Ms PLEDGER—There is plenty of competition to get into Princes Hill.

Ms STOKES—The other thing that was quite strong, particularly with school council, is that it really is about a school decision. It is not something that should come from the state: it is about a school and its culture and deciding what should be done in regard to uniform or no uniform.

Mr FINN—On the issue of the parents' sampling of opinions, was there any support at all for uniforms?

Ms PLEDGER—I think there were two people who said they did not have a problem with uniforms per se, but actually enjoyed the fact that they did not have to spend the money on a uniform. No, it seemed to me that, of the people who responded, nobody was writing to express a position of pro uniform.

Mr FINN—What was the percentage of parents who responded?

Ms PLEDGER—I am trying to think how many. It was not a big amount. We have only started this year. That is the amount of email commentary that I got back and I think that was about 10 or 12 parents.

Mr GOODMAN—That is in addition to—

Ms PLEDGER—That is separate from the submission.

Mr GOODMAN—Yes, and for that I would have got 30, 40 separate responses. So all up it is quite a significant number of parents that have responded.

Ms PLEDGER—And in terms of who I emailed, that was about 50 per cent of people who responded, which is a pretty good response really.

Ms STOKES—We ask for parent response quite a lot on a number of different issues that we have within the school. We send it out and ask for email response, and this one would be by far the biggest response that we have had from parents, and overwhelmingly in support of being uniform-free.

The CHAIR—Gayle, in terms of the primary school, do you have a feel for parents' views?

Ms LOFHELM—The majority of parents do not want school uniform. As I said, we have items of clothing that some parents buy in the prep year and send their children off in, and halfway through the year, or even earlier, those children are not wearing the full uniform. It is rare that you see anyone in a full outfit of tops and matching pants or skirts or things like that. They will tend to wear just the T-shirts or the windcheaters.

The CHAIR—Has the top got a school logo on it?

Ms LOFHELM—Yes, and so has the windcheater. It is very few children, and certainly by the upper grades there are very few wearing it, apart from the windcheaters. I would say the majority of parents would not want school uniform.

Mr FINN—Mr Chairman, can I just say that I am enormously impressed with the young people that have come along here today and had their say. We are going to have to watch ourselves. They're coming to get us! I can see that. I just want to put on the record that the contribution from the young people here today has been absolutely magnificent, and I thank you for the effort and the work that you have put into that. Bridget, you raised a matter that did take my interest. You said you did not mind if uniforms were introduced, as long as kids had a say in what the uniforms were. How would you go about implementing that? How would you go about finding out from your classmates and your schoolmates what they want as a uniform, if indeed you were to go down that track?

Miss NIELSEN-TUCK—Unusually, if we do stuff like that, all the JSC reps go back to their classrooms and they have a class meeting and a discussion with their class, and they would do surveys or they would vote or they would just talk about it. We could get people to draw specific designs that they wanted and send them into the junior school council to talk about.

The CHAIR—Initially, one of the issues I was going to ask was about students being picked on, although, Maille, you sort of covered your views on it. I wonder whether any of the rest of the students have seen occasions when they think some kids have been given a hard time because they come from poorer families maybe and they appear to dress that way or whether there are other occasions where you have seen kids picked on. I was also going to come to the question of whether there are some students from other religions—do you have any Islamic students here from Muslim families?—who have been picked on. Have you seen occasions where that has happened at all?

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—No.

Miss MORGAN—People do not really care how others dress, because of the no-uniform policy, because it makes people appreciate others' differences more. If it were a uniform, people would probably see everyone as basically the same and not appreciate differences as much.

The CHAIR—Okay, that is good. You have a good music program and so on here. When students are going from Princes Hill to represent the school, either on sporting occasions or as a band or as a group like that, do they wear a uniform?

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—We have a special sports uniform that the school provides, like I think Princes Hill Primary said they had, but we do not have a band uniform. At our school concerts—and there are not other schools there—we normally just wear black, I think, so all wear a certain colour.

The CHAIR—The sports uniform is provided by the school?

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—Yes.

Mr GOODMAN—We have football jumpers and netball and volleyball tops, as you would normally have.

Mr FINN—Gayle hit on something that keeps coming back to haunt us, Mr Chairman, and that is the issue of hats. Whilst we have not had a huge problem with primary schools, because that does not seem to be a big issue with primary schools in the kids wearing hats, we also know that secondary school students are just as capable of getting skin cancer as primary school students. Have you had a discussion about the wearing of hats here?

Ms STOKES—Through the school council, we have a number of subcommittees, one of which is school community and environment. At the moment we are developing a sun-smart policy through that subcommittee, which is going to the school forum and also to parents. It is difficult in secondary schools to get kids to wear hats and to dress in a sun-smart way, and the idea of going through the school forum is that the kids take that on and they work out a way that works for them in regard to a sun-smart policy. It is actually in process at the moment, because there is an awareness that there needs to be changes in some of the school dress in terms of a sun-smart policy.

The CHAIR—What might you be able to do?

Ms STOKES—It is literally in process at the moment, but it has to be taken on by the students themselves in terms of taking responsibility for that area, otherwise it becomes a real issue of teachers constantly having to implement it, when that is more difficult in a secondary school. There could be things in terms of clothing that covers the shoulders if you are outside, but it is about the students taking the responsibility for that.

Mr FINN—What will you do if the students come up with something that just does not fit the bill and does not provide the sort of protection from the sun that they need?

Ms STOKES—I suppose it then goes back for more discussion, and then it comes back to bringing it through again as to what the issues are and how to work through that.

Mr FINN—Do you have any time line on that?

Ms STOKES—The process has just started, so over the next few months it will be going through the—

Mr FINN—So you are hoping that it will be in place before summer?

Ms STOKES—At the beginning of term 4 we hope to have some sort of policy in place.

The CHAIR—Do some of the students wear hats at especially sunny times of the year?

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—I do not think so, no. Lots of caps get worn by the boys.

The CHAIR—Caps, yes. I meant caps as well. What percentage of people might wear caps if it were a sunny day?

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—Lots of the boys do. Quite a few in our class are known to always wear caps.

Miss MORGAN—I know at least for the first term there was one boy in our class who liked to wear a sombrero.

Mr FINN—That would protect you from the sun!

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—Yes.

The CHAIR—Are they allowed to be worn in class, or do they have to take them off in class?

Miss MORGAN—Caps are worn, but not the sombrero.

The CHAIR—That would prevent the students behind from seeing, wouldn't it?

Miss MORGAN—Yes.

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—He could bring it in—he just was not allowed to wear it.

Miss MORGAN—Yes, he had to put it under the table, I think.

The CHAIR—Bridget and Alessa, you would normally wear hats to school in the summer, in the first and last terms?

Miss KRON—Yes, we have to wear hats in terms 1 and 4.

The CHAIR—Does anybody wear sunscreen in the summer, or do you think you are inside more often and you do not need it?

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—My mum forces me to wear sunscreen.

Miss WILSON—Yes, but my mum makes me wear sunscreen.

Miss MORGAN—I wear sunscreen, yes, but not really hats and stuff; basically just sunscreen.

The CHAIR—Okay.

Miss ABAY—I have siblings that go to a uniform school, and I asked them, 'Do you wear your hat?' and they answered me with no. When you move into high school from primary school, where you are forced to wear a hat or else you go to the green seats, you are shown that you have to be mature and do those things on your own accord. I wear sunscreen because I get freckles, and I get punished if I do not wear it. People who get sunburnt have to then suffer the consequences if they do not wear a hat or they do not wear sunscreen. At high school the year 11 and year 12 VCE students that are nearly adults are being told what to do by probably some teachers that are only maybe in their 20s. Teachers that are only a couple of years older are telling them to do something. In high school you have a responsibility, and that is to also wear hats and wear sunscreen.

The CHAIR—I was also going to ask the students—and I might go around you individually—why you have come to Princes? What were the alternatives? Why have you come to Princes Hill Secondary School? Can you tell us in a short way? Yes, where do you live, in general terms?

Miss ABAY—I used to live just around the corner. My mum said, 'I think you should go to Melbourne Girls College.' I looked at the school. I went there actually for a week, the first week of school, and I did not like it. I called the old principal and said, 'Please, please, can I come to this school?' because (1) it was convenient and (2) I knew some of the people here already that said they loved it and they said, 'You don't have to wear a uniform. It's so cool,' and all that. I also got asked to move to Williamstown and I could have gone to that school. But not being able to even have colour in your hair or facial piercing or anything like that, not to be able to express anything but what everyone else was—I love the fact that you have got freedom.

The CHAIR—Okay. Maille.

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—I live in the Reservoir-Preston area. Lots of my friends were going to Santa Maria College but I did not like the idea of a Catholic school. Some of my friends told me they did not really enjoy it. I chose Princes Hill because of the music program mainly, because I play a few instruments and that is how I got in, not being in the area.

The CHAIR—That is good. William.

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—I used to live in West Preston but our house was forced to have renovations because the back was falling over, so we moved around the corner because it was the first house we found. So this became an option. I came on a tour and everything looked really good, and I know quite a few people that go here, so I had good reviews from them.

The CHAIR—Thea.

Miss MORGAN—I live around Royal Parade, so I was in the zone. My other option was to go to University High, where my parents wanted me to go. I really wanted to come here because most of my friends were coming here as well, but I liked the school. I looked at Uni High and it seemed so big and I did not really want to go there that much. I preferred this school.

The CHAIR—Okay. Mia.

Miss WILSON—At the time I was actually living in Richmond. I was going to have to go to Melbourne Girls, and I really did not like the school. I had a tour of this school and I really enjoyed it and I came back again and again for tours. I actually did not get in, so me and my mum moved over here into the zone.

The CHAIR—You are serious. You even got mum moving. That is very good. All right. I have one other question I wanted to ask. I will come to the primaries in a moment to find out what schools you think you will go to when you go onto secondary. In terms of the dress code, how often are you dealing with students who break the dress code, and how might that dress code be broken?

Mr GOODMAN—There are a few ways but not many. One would be wearing inappropriate material: material that promotes drug use or material that might be considered offensive by another student. That is rare. In the few instances that I have seen, when I have instructed students that that is not appropriate or had a discussion with them about the appropriateness of it, they have been able to see that that is inappropriate and the issue has not been one that has gone on. The other one is thongs: thongs are not permitted. That is largely a question of access up and down the stairs and the danger with regard to that. Every summer we have a few instances of requiring students to take their thongs home and come back with appropriate footwear. Just by being firm and consistent at the start of the summer months, that is one that usually stops, but it is one that we keep an eye on over summer.

The other one is inappropriate footwear in the specialist classrooms around the school—in the technology area down on level 1 and the science area. Obviously they have to have covered shoes. But there again, if students are not wearing the appropriate footwear, they are told that they must or they might be excluded from activities. In my experience that has not happened at all actually. We are talking about very isolated instances of students wearing inappropriate footwear and occasionally they might wear a T-shirt or something where we say, 'You can't wear that.'

The CHAIR—And generally there has not been any argument?

Mr GOODMAN—No, there is not argument.

Mr FINN—John, do you have a dress standard here for teachers as well?

Mr GOODMAN—No, we do not. I think our teachers' dress is reasonable as well. I do not think that there is any pushing of the boundaries or any attempts to be sort of over the top or outlandish. I think the dress sense is responsible and reasonable on that front.

The CHAIR—I will ask the parents' representatives and then the students if they think that there should be some dress standards for teachers as well.

Ms STOKES—That is an interesting one, because sometimes you look at the school photos and the kids are all dressed very reasonably and sometimes you see the teachers in shoe-string tops in the middle of summer and you think, 'Well, modelling to students, they probably should have something covering their shoulders and not be in the shoe-string tops.'

Mr FINN—That's just the blokes!

Ms STOKES—In this case it was the women. In terms of modelling what students should wear, I think it should be fairly reflective. But, again, often students comment about teachers here that they feel they have a personality and they are able to express that, so I do not think they would want a lot of restriction on what the teachers wear.

The CHAIR—Thank you for that.

Ms PLEDGER—I cannot recall any teacher that I have seen dressed in something that has made me remember and think, 'tsk tsk tsk'. I think it would be reasonable to expect teachers to dress to a reasonable standard, and by and large they do. If I saw a teacher in a shoe-string top in summer, I might have a word somewhere along the way because I do believe we should all be encouraging sun-smart wear in the school and, if we expect the kids to be dressing appropriately, then that applies to all people who are out in the sun on school business. Unless it becomes an issue that teachers are not dressing appropriately, I do not see a need to implement a code, but if that started happening then I have no problem encouraging the staff to develop a code of dress. What is good for the ducklings is good for the ducks.

The CHAIR—What do you think about that?

Miss ABAY—I think it would be kind of the same thing of enforcing it on the VCE students as well. By the time you are a teacher and have the responsibility of teaching, you should know what you are meant to wear and what you are not meant to wear. It is part of how they have grown up. If I saw a teacher in a really revealing top, I would be kind of 'weirded out'. They are at the right age to make those decisions for themselves.

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—If we had a sun-smart policy or a dress code that the students had to follow, I think the teachers would have to follow it as well, because it would be pretty unfair if you were outside and a teacher came up and told you off for not having a hat or not wearing sunscreen when they were not wearing it themselves. I think that if a sun-smart dress code was enforced, the teachers would have to follow it as well.

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—I do not really have a problem with the way teachers dress. I have not noticed any inappropriate clothing. If they got a dress code, even now, it probably would not make a difference because none of them infringe on any kind of dress code that I can think of.

Miss MORGAN—Yes. I think all the teachers tend to dress appropriately. But I agree with Maille: if there was a sun-smart policy brought in, you would not think it was fair if the teachers were wearing something that was not really sun smart and they told you off for not wearing something that is sun smart.

Miss WILSON—Yes, I think all the teachers dress appropriately. I do not think that they really need to change anything.

The CHAIR—I was going to follow on then to ask Bridget and Alessa: when you go to secondary, do you have any ideas at present where you might go?

Miss KRON—I know that I am going to MLC.

The CHAIR—Because you have a big sister there already?

Miss KRON—No, because I got a scholarship there.

Miss NIELSEN-TUCK—I have not heard where I am going yet, but my first preference was Melbourne Girls College because my sister went there and my parents think it is a really good school. My other preferences were possibly here and Brunswick and Uni High.

The CHAIR—So a lot of work to do yet before the decision is finalised. Do you have any questions, Jennifer?

Ms HOPE—No.

The CHAIR—Does anybody in the audience have any views that they feel strongly about that they would like to share? If you do, for the benefit of the tape that we are doing, just come up to the table so you are by that microphone there. Dylan Leach?

Mr LEACH—Yes, that is me. I pretty much want to say what these guys have been saying—the year 7s and Kez. They have pretty much been the thoughts of the majority of the students here—that we are very proud of the no-uniform, casual clothes aspect of the school. It is reflected around on the windows.

The CHAIR—We did notice something before.

Mr LEACH—The no uniform, I gather, is prestigious to this school as much as, say, the blazer at Wesley College is to them. People say, 'If there are uniforms, then they're all one people; there's no competition.' But I ask you this: have you noticed that when you see some private school kids, on their uniforms they like to have little badges stating what they do and how they are ranked in the school? So how are people equal if they have, 'I am the captain of rowing,' on a little lapel on their blazer?

I think it is a matter where you should really just stick to the status quo. If a school does not want to wear a uniform, then they should not be forced to. It would cause an uproar in this school if they said, no, we are going to have to wear a uniform. Also I think it would be very hard to enforce in the later year levels. If next year you guys decided that every school must wear a uniform, it might wash down easier with the new year 7s, because they are new and they have just come into the school, and maybe even the year 8s and the year 9s, but I highly doubt that would be so with the year 10s, 11s and 12s who have been here for four years and have been able to wear what they like, and there has not really been a problem.

It is not a fashion contest. Look at the jumper that I am wearing today. I have had this since grade 6. I do not think it would wash down well with them and I do not think they would want to comply with it, because they have had that option and they have not seen it is a problem. If you speak to people from private schools and you tell them that you do not wear a uniform, you get the occasional, 'How on earth do you do that? You would have to pick what you wear each day.' But because you are so used to it—it is what you know—it is not really that much of an issue. Stick to the status quo would be my message, because things are fine the way they are. Very conservative, I know, but it works.

The CHAIR—Thanks, Dylan.

Mr FINN—Dylan, I know you are out of here at the end of year, so it is not something that will concern you at all.

Mr LEACH—No.

Mr FINN—But if I could ask you to use your imagination for a moment: in your mind, say you were coming back here next year and you were starting year 12 all over again—

Mr LEACH—Oh, God!

Mr FINN—and the government dictated or mandated—call it what you will—the wearing of uniforms at this school and all other schools, how would you and your classmates react?

Mr LEACH—I think there would be a stage of rebellion.

Mr FINN—To what degree?

Mr LEACH—To a degree that people might just make alterations to the uniform. If the school went for the tie and blazer, people might just wear the blazer and wear some crazy shirt underneath. Knowing this school's culture, it would happen. There would be a very unpopular reaction to the uniform and people might be making alterations to it with textas and what have you. This is just me using my imagination from what I gather.

Ms PLEDGER—Bernie, can I just say: I know there are a lot of parents who would not be buying that uniform.

Ms STOKES—There would be a lot of civil disobedience, which would start with basically being unable to decide what to have as a uniform and then not buying it.

Ms PLEDGER—Yes, and there would be some reference to self-governing schools in Victoria, and where do school councils fit in?

Ms STOKES—Yes, there would be a lot of disagreement.

Mr LEACH—I have been a student of both Princes Hill Primary and Princes Hill Secondary, so there has been no uniform throughout my entire school life, and again there has never ever been a problem. I do not think my parents have had problems financially with clothes. Mind you, I am from a well-off background. And I have not seen that amongst other students.

The CHAIR—Should we recommend as a government that no state schools have uniforms?

Ms PLEDGER—That is not a bad way to go.

Mr LEACH—I think it should be up to the schools and the school councils to make that decision. It might suit the culture of another school as opposed to this school. This school is suited to a no-uniform culture but what is to say that with some other secondary school it suits their attitudes and how they teach their students and what they think is right.

The CHAIR—There is a good deal of clarity that comes with having a uniform-free policy. It is just clear. I think when we were doing the tour earlier I spoke of the fact that some government schools tie themselves in knots where they have a policy where the senior school students just wear a top and they can wear anything below, and it is a complete disaster. It is the worst of both ends of the divide. I think that a uniform-free approach is quite clear as well. I think that is one of its virtues.

Ms STOKES—And it is about being a school decision that is reflective of what is happening in the school.

The CHAIR—Thanks, Dylan. Anybody else? You're Eli, are you? We had your name on our list as being here.

Miss DUNPHY—Yes, I chickened out.

The CHAIR—Well, you get your chance now.

Miss DUNPHY—I would like to bring up two points. One is difference, which has been talked about a lot, and the other is change. For a start, difference: to go back why I picked this school, I was living in St Kilda at the time, so it was a fair haul for me to get here. I was looking around at schools with my mum and

I went to Uni High and I went to a lot of schools. I have been to six schools altogether, so I have had a lot of experience in different sorts of schools. A lot of them were overseas and stuff like that. Anyway, I came to this school and as soon as I walked in I noticed that, unlike all the other high schools I had visited, no-one looked at me and questioned who I was and what my business was being here. I felt so welcome, and I did not know anyone here. I had no friends, and I just felt a warmth from everyone.

I knew straightaway that I wanted to come here, and my mum was so willing to go by what I wanted that she moved us to Paterson Street, which is just this street here, so that I could come here. On that note, I think this school has a tolerance for difference and the unknown, which is rare not only in schools but in the world. I really value that about this school and I think that would change if uniform was brought in, because the lack of uniform really encourages that tolerance. There are many different people from different backgrounds and different economical status and that sort of thing. Obviously it is a high school, and there is going to be bullying. I have seen maybe two examples of bullying in my entire six years at this school, which I can tell you is incredible. That is difference.

I also wanted to talk about change, because especially at this age I know that, myself, I go through so many changes—everybody does at this age, and at any age—but it is really important to be able to express that change. Especially in year 9 I find that the kids are struggling with who they are and how they want to act and what kinds of people they want to be around. If you do not allow for their expression through what they are wearing, then they will look for expression through how they act and what they say. I think it is important to be able to tolerate that change as well. People judge you if you come to school one day and you are wearing something else—you have a different haircut and it is not what people say is 'you'—but I have found that in this school especially it is really tolerated and that is really healthy.

The CHAIR—Terrific. Jennifer.

Ms HOPE—Eli, you have attended a few schools, you said, so I will assume that you have friends who do go to uniform schools. I would be interested to know how you think this affects them and whether you notice that they have different attitudes on some things from you going to a non-uniform school.

Miss DUNPHY—I have a few friends that go to Caulfield Grammar and PCW, I think. My experience of them—it is only three or four people—is that they judge people on what they wear and they judge themselves on what they wear, and they spend an hour getting ready to go out and see people that they consider to be friends. I said to one of them, 'If they're friends, then why are you so worried about how you look around them?' and she said, 'Because it makes me feel good.' But you should be able to feel good wearing anything, because you can be yourself, and you can act the way you want to act. That is just my experience, though.

Ms HOPE—Thanks, Eli.

The CHAIR—Dylan, you might like to answer that question, too. If you have friends at other schools, do you notice a difference in their attitudes in any way?

Mr LEACH—Yes, absolutely. I had friends that went to an all-girls' school and they were rather bemused when I told them, 'I go to Princes Hill. We don't wear a uniform,' and they said to me, 'That would be terrible. Sure, it's fine for you as a boy because you don't care about what you wear,' and I know that's gender stereotype, it is horrible, but they were going on the whole spiel about, 'Oh, you'd have to worry about what you wear, and when we have that once a semester casual dress day it's horrible because we're all trying to pick out the most fashionable thing to wear,' so they all have this impression that it is a one-stop fashion contest when it is absolutely not the case, because we are just so used to seeing everyone in casual clothes that we do not make the observation; we do not rank them by the clothing that they wear. If we judge people, I think at this school we tend to judge them on personality and what kinds of people they are, as opposed to what clothes they wear, what religion, what socioeconomic background they are from. But there is a perception out there from people at uniform schools. I suppose it is the case that all we know—especially me—is a school without uniform; never gone to a school with a uniform. I suppose their perception is, 'Well, at school you've got to wear a uniform because that's what we do and that's what school life is.' It is probably two completely different walks of life in regard to that issue.

Ms HOPE—So it changes their perception of what school is; what the school experience is?

Mr LEACH—Yes, I suppose because they wear a uniform and that is what they know, and because we come here and we wear what we like, that is all we know.

Ms HOPE—Thank you.

The CHAIR—Would you like to come forward? Could you say your name clearly so that we have it on tape.

Mr DOWSETT—Andre Dowsett. I will follow up on the question about people from other schools who have uniforms. I have a friend who went to Northcote High. He spent a lot of time having suspensions because he did not want to comply with the school uniform. I do not see why he should be missing out on school because he did not want to wear a uniform; he just wanted to express himself. But because he did that he missed out on school and it did not help him at all. Another point I would like to make is that school, from what I know, is about preparing you for life. They say that all the time here—'preparing you for life' and whatnot. I do not see how making us wear a uniform would help us. It is not going to help us out in life because we do not wear a uniform anywhere. I do not see how that will help us at all. We should be able to express ourselves, because once we get outside of school we are going to have to express ourselves, and people that do have to wear a uniform might find it a bit harder when they do get out of school. William made a good point on that as well, saying, 'When should we introduce uniforms?' When you get to uni, why take it off?

If we were to have a uniform, the best way to do it would probably be for the students to decide on it, but I still do not think that would work very well because everyone's idea of a good uniform is different, so how could everyone decide on a good uniform to wear? Some people are going to be happy with it and some people are not. Thank you.

The CHAIR—Thanks, Andre. Anybody else? Come down to the front.

Mr NICHOLAS—I am Jamie Nicholas from Princes Hill Primary. Going back a few years—about six years ago when I was in prep—I think it was my mum who told me that a school uniform was good because it makes you be like a representative; it makes you feel proud and that. Then later on people started teasing me and I was not really getting along with them and everything, so I started not to wear it, and then my mum started asking why and that and, yes, I had to make up excuses. I do not really care if I wear a uniform or not; it is just that if it is not that comfortable or anything, like if it is tight or anything, I do not really prefer that. It is like I'm too young and that.

The CHAIR—So you were almost being picked on because you were wearing a uniform and your friends were not wearing a uniform?

Mr NICHOLAS—Yes.

The CHAIR—So if you had been at a school where everybody had worn a uniform, that would have been all right.

Mr NICHOLAS—Yes, I would have jelled in.

The CHAIR—But there is a real issue then, in terms of some school cultures, like Princes Hill Primary, if some do when the majority do not.

Mr NICHOLAS—Yes.

The CHAIR—Yes, it is a reverse situation of what might happen in other places. Anything else you want to say, Jamie?

Mr NICHOLAS—No, I think that is it.

The CHAIR—When you go to secondary school, Jamie, would you want to go to a school that does not have a uniform, or one that does, or you do not mind?

Mr NICHOLAS—Well, I have to go here because my brother is here and my mum wants me to. But, yes. I do not really mind.

The CHAIR—So you will be happy here?

Mr NICHOLAS—Yes.

The CHAIR—Good on you. Thank you.

Mr NICHOLAS—Sounds good.

The CHAIR—Yes. Has Andrew given you a name plate? Good.

Miss McAULAY—I am Eleanor. What Jamie said, like in prep lots of us used to wear a uniform because it was the first time at school. That is what parents wanted you to do. I remember one day we had a fun day—and it was a twin day we voted on—and we all had to dress up the same, like twins, and you would get a prize, like a chocolate frog or something, in your classes. We had a group of girls, and we decided to wear the school uniform, and one of the girls did not want to because she liked wearing her own stuff. That was fine with her. We did not win the chocolate frog, but she was happy with what she was wearing. I am going to University High next year and they do not have a school uniform; they have a sports uniform and they wear that for special events, maybe when they need to know where to go and who is with you and stuff. I would not mind if we had a uniform at our school.

A lot of people would not like to have a uniform, but there are some people that I have talked to in my class, and my friends, and they would not mind. I would not mind wearing a uniform, because once I saw some girls sneering and laughing about this girl who was wearing something that they did not like, and I thought it is not really fair, and if you were all wearing the same thing there would be less chance that you could get bullied.

The CHAIR—Thanks, Eleanor. Anybody else?

Ms FLEMING—Vanessa Fleming. I am an individual rather than a committee representative. Our family has responded to the inquiry separately via the school. We have two adult children who have gone through a strict uniform regime and we have a child at a school that has a non-compulsory uniform. In all cases, we have been happy, and we are very happy now.

The gist of our thoughts is that wherever you send your child to school, whether it is via locality or via circumstance or via some other factor, you should respect the history of the school. Whatever was the tradition of the school, it is very hard to move from that. For instance, with uniforms people are particularly polarised—you are either one way or you are the other. We also believe in moderation. We believe that if you are particularly strict about a particular thing, it is wasting the teachers' time. For instance, I can always remember students being picked on because their tie was not tied up. That was an absolute waste of time for the teachers.

In terms of the junior school, our child does wear a uniform in a non-compulsory environment, and we would like the wearing of a uniform in some shape or form through those years because we feel that to offer a uniform of type is a service to a group of the community, just as is after care. My point is that our family unit—and our child has to fit into our family unit because of our other constraints—would ask him on occasion to wear some part of the uniform but not to be strict on it, particularly as he gets older. When he gets older and into the senior school, he will be more independent, but at the moment he is quite little. Some parents have other small children where they are up at night and they have other constraints. More so in the junior school, it would be good to have it as an option.

The CHAIR—Thank you. The only other issue I was going to raise is that there often is a view expressed by parents associated with schools that have uniforms that this is good because it helps to set a tone of discipline in the school, and they feel more comfortable that there is a disciplinary rigour and that students know there are limits in which to behave. The question follows on to Helen and other people as parents—but any body can comment on that—whether at Princes Hill you have totally disproved that.

Mr FINN—Geoff, could I just add a quote that we received at one of our hearings that grabbed my attention, and I thought it would be interesting to get some reactions here to it, and that is, 'Putting on the uniform affects children's behaviour.'

Ms STOKES—One of the reasons we choose the school and we are happy with the school is that it is about the children themselves taking responsibility for where they are going, what they are doing, and the school facilitating and assisting that. Having no uniform and that being a choice that they make—and a responsible choice—is a really important thing. I think discipline is another issue. That happens through the school, and happens well, but it is also about the kids being responsible for themselves, their learning and in the classroom. Whether you wear a uniform or not I do not think is dependent on that.

Ms PLEDGER—It also occurs to me that adolescents are rather driven to express themselves, and if they are all imposed with the one uniform they are more likely to be acting out in order to express themselves rather than just through their appearance. So it may well have the adverse effect. Students who are wearing uniforms may think they are being well behaved, but that is probably relative to their own experience of what good behaviour is. I think we have seen plenty of examples in the media of uniformed children misbehaving over the last year.

The CHAIR—Yes, indeed. I noticed Andre said that his friend at Northcote had been suspended several times because he was not wearing a uniform. It is easy if you have a uniform: you can rebel by not wearing the uniform. How do you rebel if you are at a school that does not have a uniform?

Mr DOWSETT—It is under the table.

The CHAIR—I see.

Mr DOWSETT—Maybe there is nothing to rebel from because we are not wearing uniforms.

Mr FINN—That takes the fun out of being a kid, though.

The CHAIR—William was going to say something and then we will come back to Helen.

Mr KAVANAGH-RYAN—One form of rebellion, as you have seen, could be putting things on windows.

The CHAIR—Political protest or protest by slogans, yes.

Ms STOKES—A lot of schools, particularly those with very rigid uniform structures, at the end of year 12 are bringing security cards into the school to contain the conduct of the kids within the school, because they have to rebel. They have been constrained for six years and they have to get out on that last year 12 day. Here—and I think John would support this; I have had one child go through year 12 here—there is not that sense that you have to rebel. The last day of year 12 is a really pleasant day, where the kids actually enjoy their last day.

Mr GOODMAN—I would agree with that, and I think that the spirit here that we are trying to encourage is one of mutual cooperation rather than a rigid sort of chain of command with the kids. We have student welfare and discipline issues, like any other school, but I do not think that the introduction of a uniform would have any positive impact in that area. I think that Helen's point is true. At the end of year 12 that is a good illustration that the year 12 students feel a part of the community and do not feel the need to sort of react in a significant way and muck up.

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—When you are talking about the end of year 12 and the last day, I know that it was a sort of tradition at some schools—I have siblings of my friends who have finished year 12—that they burn their uniform afterwards. I have heard of that happening as well.

Mr FINN—I believe in some places they burn the school! John, in this day and age, unfortunately, security is something that we all have to take into consideration. In a school that has a uniform, obviously it is easy to pick out somebody who is not in a uniform. Do you have any particular way of dealing with that situation here?

Mr GOODMAN—Students have an identification card which they use for photocopying and for other administrative things—library access and that sort of thing. We do not insist that they carry it with them at all times, but that is an identifying feature if you are completely unsure. I am pretty clear on who is a member of the school community and who is not, and I have only been here for a year. It is pretty clear after a while, I think, who our student population is. It is fair to say that that is something that we have to continually keep an eye on, but I do not think it is such a concern that it would cause us to reflect on or alter a policy like our uniform-free approach.

It might be the case that, if we felt it was a concern, we might do a bit more follow-up on students having the appropriate identification card, but we also have a really clear expectation with students that, if friends come or people from outside come, they come to the front office and they report. If they do not do this, students know that there is a consequence for that, and we take that very seriously. We make it very clear to students that they are not permitted to have students out the front of the school who have not come into the school to announce their presence, and our compliance from students on those types of behaviours is very high.

If that was not happening, then it might be a concern that we would have to look at, but because our compliance, with student cooperation, with saying, 'Oh, I just saw somebody outside the front of the school who shouldn't be there,' is very good, then I do not think it is much of a concern for us at the moment certainly.

Mr FINN—But that is something that is under review.

Mr GOODMAN—It is something that we keep an eye on constantly, yes.

The CHAIR—Andre, you were going to say something?

Mr DOWSETT—We had an incident a couple of years back when some people from another school came in. They just walked into the school, stayed for about five minutes, and then the cops were called and they left. So I do not think there is any need to worry about security from other schools and stuff so far, because it is like Mr Goodman said, we know the people that come to the school and we know the people that do not.

The CHAIR—Any other questions here? You would like to say something? Sorry, I missed you.

Mr NESSER—Ashley Nasser. I would like to say that what you are hearing here is one side of the argument. You are hearing basically everyone saying we are against uniforms and such. My sister has been through the secondary school process at a school where they had uniforms, and I can see the difficulty in it—that financial difficulties can arise, though that was not a problem with us, and other factors relating to, 'Well, we have to sort the schoolbooks out first. Now we have to worry about does your uniform still fit. Is it still applicable?' But then you also have to think that, in life, these kids are going to reach a stage where they are going to have to disregard everything they have been through, with the freedom of dress, and they are going to have to start dressing in suits. They are going to reach a point where they are going to have to move on. If there was a uniform at this school, people would have to learn to get on with it; you know, life does go on. Things do continue after a uniform can be introduced. It may sound like a major change but there are bigger things in life.

The CHAIR—Yes, that is different perspective. That is good. Thanks, Ashley. Yes, come down to the front, too.

Mr ATKINS—My name is Cato. I do not know why uniforms cost so much. They wholly make them in China and they probably only cost like \$2 to make, so I do not see why they have to cost more so poor families cannot buy them.

The CHAIR—Yes. As a committee—the issue has not been, 'Do you or don't you have uniform'—we have looked at a number of issues associated with: where do you buy uniforms? How do schools sell them? Who produces them? Can you make them more cheaply? Is there an issue why you should in fact favour Australian made? There are a number of issues like that that will come out in our report. We have been listening to people who explain to us sometimes why they cost as much as they do and that they are good-quality fabrics that need to last, and that if you go for the cheap ones sometimes they do not last as long. There are a number of issues like that that we are looking at, Cato, in terms of our review over the whole process. But that is a good point. thank you.

Mr ATKINS—Okay.

Mr RESIC—I am Max. I am trying to get into Princes Hill next year because I think Princes Hill caters for all my needs. I wanted to go to Uni High because my cousin was there; I knew him and he kept saying Uni High was really good. But most of my friends who used to go to Princes Hill Primary last year say that Princes Hill is a really good school. Going to the uniform, I live in Brunswick and I see lots of kids from the Brunswick Secondary College, and their shoes for their school, I do not really like wearing them. Most of the boys in the school and some girls will play sport and they are really uncomfortable to play sport in, because sport is a very big issue. So if you have a uniform, usually you have those shoes—I am not sure what they are called but they are like—

The CHAIR—Stiff-soled shoes anyway.

Mr RESIC—Yes, and it is really hard to kick or do sport in them, or run. So if we could have a choice of wearing perhaps black, you could wear black runners, so maybe that would be good. And the bags, you know how they usually hang down with books, maybe you could make bags that are easier, because when you get to high school you have lots and lots of books, so it is really uncomfortable if you have bags that hang down. My auntie was one of the members who abolished the uniform back in 1973.

The CHAIR—What was her name?

Mr RESIC—Fatima Alisak

The CHAIR—You meant that she was a member of a school?

Mr RESIC—She came to Princes Hill and she abolished the uniform. She came to school one day without the uniform and she got sent home, and then my grandmother was really angry at her, and my grandmother sent her to school the next day with the uniform and she took it off on the tram and put on clothes, and then she got suspended. So from then on everyone was really rebelling.

The CHAIR—Yes, right, she started something.

Mr RESIC—That is what I wanted to say.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much.

Miss KRON—I want to add to what Max said. I agree that uniforms can be really impractical. I know that my brother in primary school had to wear a uniform and the shoes were Blundstones and I think that for our school that would be ridiculous because most of the boys at our school like to play footy on the oval, or soccer, and that sort of foot gear is really not appropriate. If they had to wear white shirts that had to be ironed or whatever, I do not think that would work because if they are tackling in footy, that is just not going to work. Especially if both parents work, it can be hard to have clean shirts and, if the uniform policy is strict, that could be really stressful. If the uniform has to be spotless and the boy is playing footy or whatever on the oval

and getting the shirt muddy, that could be really stressful for the parents if they have to continually wash the clothes.

The CHAIR—That is right, yes. Do you change for phys ed classes? Do you just have lighter gear to wear for phys ed?

Miss MORGAN—Yes. We have to wear tracksuits and runners and stuff. We are not allowed to have jeans.

Miss HALLORAN-MACKAY—There is a system that they count how many times you forget or you do not wear a sports uniform when you come. I think it is three strikes and you get a lunchtime detention; four and I think it is after school; and then meeting with parents—something like that.

The CHAIR—Okay. Thea.

Miss MORGAN—Back on the other subject, I have been to three primary schools: at two of them you had to wear a uniform and at one of them it was optional. I know that I preferred the primary school where it was optional. Also, the uniforms can be very impractical because they are hard to move in, if you are wearing your jumpers and stuff.

The CHAIR—All right, that has just about done us. Thank you very much. Thank you especially to the students. It has been terrific to have you all along and contributing as you have done.

Mr FINN—Absolutely.

The CHAIR—You have contributed very eloquently and really given us a strong feeling for why we should consider not making uniform compulsory for everyone. We did go to Darwin not so long ago, because in the Northern Territory just this last year their parliament brought out a regulation requiring schools to have a compulsory uniform. They also at the same time broke their secondary schooling into a middle school and a senior school phase so seniors did not have to wear it, just for interest, but the middle school and primary schools are all having to change to uniforms over this next year, if they have not already adopted it. That was the model that we looked at. But certainly it is good to come to Princes Hill and to get a feeling for a range of reasons why we should not go down that path in Victoria.

Obviously we will have to discuss that in more detail as a committee, and a report will come out probably later in the year talking about the outcome, or it may not be until next year. That will obviously be discussed and considered by the parliament. Thank you all. Thank you to Princes Hill for hosting today and for inviting us along and thank you to everybody who has contributed.

Witnesses withdrew.

Committee adjourned.