

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 6 September 2007

Legislative Assembly chamber

Members

Mr M. Dixon (from 18 September 2007)	Dr A. Harkness
Mr N. Elasmarr	Mr S. Herbert
Mr B. Finn (1 March – 18 September 2007)	Mr G. Howard
Mr P. Hall	Mr N. Kotsiras

Chair: Mr G. Howard

Deputy Chair: Mr N. Kotsiras

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Ellingford

Research Officer: Ms J. Hope

Committee Administrative Officer: Ms N. Tyler

Witnesses

Victorian secondary school students (refer page 2 and 3)

Apollo Bay P-12 College

Miss Claire Beggs, Year 11

Miss Courtney Gardiner, Year 10

Mr Joshua Trew, Year 11

Bacchus Marsh College

Mr Daniel Bartlett, Year 9

Mr David Dodemaide, Year 11

Miss Essie Jansen, Year 11

Miss Elise Whitney, Year 9

Ballarat Secondary College

Miss Bronwyn Buby, Year 12

Miss Stephanie Pittard, Year 12

Miss Courtney Sheridan, Year 12

Miss Stacey Thomas, Year 12

Balwyn High School

Mr Josh Centeno, Year 10

Miss Grace Cliffe, Year 10

Mr Jordan Rosen, Year 8

Miss Jacqui Shemer, Year 10

Bendigo Senior Secondary College

Mr Jarrod Appleby, Year 12

Mr Jaan Butler, Year 12

Miss Simone Hotchin, Year 12

Mr Daniel Howells, Year 12

Collingwood P-12 College

Miss Elly Gritzalis, Year 9

Mr Conway Hyde, Year 10

Mr Andrew Lomax, Year 11

Miss Morgan Pumpa, Year 10

Eltham High School

Miss Shamira Armstrong, Year 12

Mr Nicholas Hudson, Year 12

Mr John Van Noorden, Year 12

Miss Larissa Vendramini, Year 12

Footscray City College

Miss Ellana Hedger, Year 7

Miss Sinead Mildenhall, Year 9

Miss Anna Sturmeay, Year 8

Mr Darby Turnbull, Year 8

Frankston High School

Miss Victoria Gerard, Year 12

Mr Adam Greig, Year 12

Miss Chelsea Hogg, Year 12

Mr Stephen Toms, Year 12

Kew High School

Mr Ryan Close, Year 12

Miss Emma Koehn, Year 11

Miss Ashleigh Mullan, Year 12

Miss Katie Watson, Year 11

Kyneton Secondary College

Mr Cameron Baker, Year 9

Miss Nicole Harman, Year 9

Miss Johanna Longmuir, Year 9

Mr Jack Mackintosh, Year 9

Lowanna College

Mr Brendan Brentwood, Year 9

Miss Emma Forte, Year 12

Mr Jacob Keenan, Year 9

Mr Harley Wood, Year 10

Melbourne Girls College

Miss Hannah Brown, Year 11

Miss Erika Codognotto, Year 11

Miss Megan Pearce, Year 11

Miss Georgia Simmons, Year 9

Melbourne High School

Mr Patrick Clearwater, Year 12

Mr Peter Harvey, Year 10

Mr Alex Liao, Year 11

Mr Dean Williams, Year 9

Sandringham College

Mr Jack Clarke, Year 9

Miss Nicola Hajnal, Year 10

Miss Charlotte Mardling, Year 9

Mr Robert Nyaguy, Year 10

Shepparton High School

Miss Sonja Dewar, Year 10

Miss Catriona Forrester, Year 10

Miss Eilidh Forrester, Year 10

Miss Joanna Veal, Year 10

Templestowe College

Mr John Edney, Year 11

Miss Mollie Ellis, Year 11

Miss Annelise Milne, Year 9

Mr Marcus Reeves, Year 10

University High School

Miss Lizzie Forrest, Year 11

Mr Jack Howes, Year 11

Miss Caitlin Koller, Year 11

Miss Olivia Koh, Year 11

Warragul Regional College

Mr Lochlin Deegan, Year 10

Mr Nathan Dubbeld, Year 10

Miss Kirby Taylor, Year 10

Miss Melissa Young, Year 10

Werribee Secondary College

Miss Shani Cashin, Year 11

Mr Joel Fisk, Year 12

Mr Johnny Hamilton, Year 10

Mr Praveen Jacob, Year 10

Western Heights Secondary College

Miss Naomi Chapple, Year 8

Miss Kaytlyn Fitzgerald, Year 8

Miss Lyndall Morris, Year 8

Mr Jack Wright, Year 8

Yea High School

Mr Bradley Exton, Year 9

Miss Brooke Lloyd, Year 9

Miss Jessica McDonald, Year 11

Mr Stephen Smith, Year 11

The CHAIR — I declare this hearing of the Education and Training Committee open. The Education and Training Committee is an all-party joint investigatory committee of the Parliament of Victoria. It is hearing evidence today in relation to its inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools. I wish to advise all present at this hearing that all evidence taken by the committee is subject to parliamentary privilege and is granted immunity from judicial review pursuant to the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act. Welcome.

I did welcome you all earlier out in Queen's Hall, and again I am very pleased that we are now in the house and about to begin discussions on this mock bill — the School Uniform Bill 2007 — that is before you today. As I advised you earlier, the topic of school uniforms is one that the committee has been dealing with, and we felt that to have you all here today, in the Parliament, would be a novel way to hear your points of view in regard to those various issues associated with school uniforms and dress codes that the committee has been considering.

We also thought it would be an opportunity for you to understand how the Parliament of Victoria works, how legislation is developed and that it would be a good educational opportunity for you to be here at Parliament today, so I am glad so many of you have been able to take the opportunity.

Two members of the committee are here in the house with me today. The government member of the committee who is sitting in the chair normally taken by the Premier is Steve Herbert, member for Eltham, who will be leading off on the bill in a moment. Steve was the chair of this committee in the last government.

In the position normally occupied by the Leader of the Opposition is Nick Kotsiras, the member for Bulleen. He is a Liberal member of Parliament, and shortly he will lead off with the opposition statement on the bill.

In a moment we will go through the key parts of this bill, but we will start as we would normally do in this house. When a bill is introduced, first it is read a first time, which means that the bill brought forward by the government would be introduced in a very brief way. The minister or the Premier would simply say, 'I seek leave to bring in a bill relating to school uniforms'. That would be dealt with by the Parliament.

Normally then the bill would be held over for at least two weeks so that the bill could be distributed, and people could discuss it and formulate viewpoints on the bill. The bill would then come back to the house after a period of two or more weeks, when it is second read and a more detailed speech made by the appropriate government minister introducing the bill; then the bill would be debated by the Parliament.

I will now hand over to Steve Herbert who is representing the government, as it were, on this occasion — at least, speaking from the government side of the house — to make effectively a second-reading speech on the bill.

Mr HERBERT — Firstly, I welcome members of Parliament. Looking opposite, I can genuinely say that I can see today an improvement in the intellectual calibre of those members sitting opposite me, although I might get some disagreement from the member for Bulleen.

As the Chair of the committee has just indicated, it is the normal custom for any bill that comes in to have a second-reading speech made by the minister in charge of it, or, if it is a special bill, perhaps by the Premier. It basically outlines for the house and the public what is contained in that bill. That is what the second-reading speech I will do today will do.

As the Chair has said, the reason we are doing this is that it is novel and interesting way of engaging students from across Victoria in the course of the committee's deliberations to provide a report on school uniforms. As we know, the issue of school uniforms is quite topical in schools across the state, in fact right across Australia, and that is why the government has passed this reference to the committee.

In terms of the second-reading speech, I will begin. The key measures proposed in the School Uniforms Bill 2007 includes the introduction of compulsory school uniforms in all Victorian government schools. This follows moves by some other states and territories in Australia, which have already either made school uniforms compulsory or are in fact considering it right now.

Most government schools in Victoria have already had uniforms for some time. Students, teachers, parents and principals at these schools have spoken highly of the benefits of having a uniform for everyone in the school community. Teachers and staff feel proud to work with students in uniform because it creates a professional

atmosphere focused on learning. It also has benefits for the school's reputation in the community. When students wear their uniforms proudly outside the school grounds it generally enhances the community's acceptance of that school.

Teachers and staff who we have spoken to as a committee feel proud to work with students in uniform because it creates a professional atmosphere focused on learning. They have also described to the committee the benefits to the school's reputation, as I said. If this bill is passed, it will make it compulsory for all Victorian schools to have uniforms and would put Victoria's public schools in a leadership role right across the nation in terms of student dress and appearance to match their outstanding academic reputation.

On the specifics of the bill, section 3 of the bill specifies that uniforms must be traditional and attractive in their designs. This would ensure that a uniform can withstand changing fashions and continue to look good throughout the school student's life. Many schools have told us that uniform policies are only successfully if they are enforced. This has been a contentious issue for many of the witnesses before the hearing. For this reason section 4 of the bill asks schools to take appropriate disciplinary action to ensure that students follow uniform policy correctly and responsibly.

The bill ensures that students who break uniform rules do not miss out on learning by prohibiting punishments such as suspension, expulsion and withdrawal from class. Under clause 4 teachers are asked to use their judgement to determine what level of discipline is appropriate in each individual situation.

The safety of students is also extremely important in regards to this bill and in regards to the role uniforms play in protecting students. It has been frequently raised that students wearing uniforms is a great way for schools to ensure that only students and not outsiders are present in schools during school hours, and that is part of the normal traditional protective things that teachers rely on with school uniforms.

We also note there are other concerns in terms of school uniforms and protection, particularly protection from sun in summer terms. Despite what we know about skin cancer, many students — and this is especially the case for secondary students — still do not wear hats, sunglasses and SunSmart clothing. So clause 5 of the bill protects both students and teachers by forcing them to dress safely in the summer sun. I note this is probably not the case for the member of the opposition here, who has a long history of being in a sunny climate and wearing a hat!

Clause 6 allows exemptions to uniform policies in special circumstances, including clothing required by a student's religion, special needs, different body shapes or health conditions. Schools should talk to these students and their families about what makes them comfortable, and call the education department if discipline is required.

Typically today's students are very conscious of brands and fashions, and keeping up with trends can be expensive. This bill ensures that, in terms of a school's selection of uniforms, they will be durable, affordable and appropriate for the school setting.

Clause 7 of the bill also reflects suggestions to the committee that schools should buy uniforms from companies that demonstrate they are Australian made and comply with ethical and environmentally friendly manufacturing standards. If schools set these standards, students may be more likely to learn how to become ethical and informed consumers in the future. The bill outlines a consultative process that schools might follow and suggests giving the education department the power to arbitrate in any disputes.

In conclusion, in terms of summing up the government's initial position on this bill, I recognise that many people believe a bill such as the one before the Parliament today would improve the appearance, morale and wellbeing of Victorian students and the ability of government schools to develop and enforce effective school uniforms. I commend the bill to the house for its consideration.

Mr KOTSIRAS — It is typical of a Socialist government, typical of a government that pretends to bring in legislation but does the opposite. If you read the bill carefully, you see it does not do what the government claims it does. It fails on every single criteria. We have a government which is huge on rhetoric and media spin and nothing more. I urge you to read the bill very carefully.

The government talks about introducing uniforms to ensure the wellbeing and safety of students. The committee has heard from individuals and schools which say the opposite. The government talks about pride; that students who wear uniforms have pride in their schools. What sort of message is that to give to our students? Is it that you

cannot have pride in your school or pride in your teachers unless you wear a school uniform? We have heard evidence from schools that do not have a compulsory school uniform that the students are very proud of the school, due to the sports they play, academic subjects, their community involvement or whatever, but pride does not mean you have to wear a school uniform.

They talk about enforcement, and yet they do not give the schools the power to enforce school uniforms. What is the point of having a compulsory school uniform if schools are told they cannot suspend or expel a student from school? What this means is that teachers will spend half the day chasing students to make sure they wear their uniforms. When they catch those students, they have got nothing to threaten the students with, because they cannot expel them and cannot withdraw them from class.

If you look at part 2, clause 4(6) says:

... measures for enforcing the uniform policy should ensure that a student's learning is not adversely affected ...

What does that mean? Does it mean that they cannot be taken away from sport? Does it mean they cannot be taken away from recess? It is all part of the learning process. In the end, students do not have to wear a school uniform, even if the school has a policy, because the government — a socialist government — refuses to give the school that authority.

They talk about safety, that it is safer to wear a sun hat. I would have thought education on that matter is much more important than legislation. You cannot force people to do things, but if you educate those people, they might wear the sun hat because they will understand why they need to wear one.

The government talks about making school uniforms compulsory to make sure that everyone is equal. I have got news for students: look around at each person, each student is different and they come from different backgrounds. In Victoria students come from over 200 different countries, they practise over 150 different religions, and yet this government is trying to make us all look the same. We are all different and that is our greatest strength.

The government talks about uniforms stopping bullying at schools. I have attended two schools: I went to Collingwood High School, which is now Collingwood College, for years 7–9; and then I went to Thornbury High School in years 10–12. Collingwood had no school uniform, students wore casual clothes. Thornbury had a full school uniform of trousers, black shoes, shirt, jumper and blazer. Guess at which school I was bullied? It was at Thornbury, not because of the uniform but because I was born in Greece. If a government claims that school uniforms will stop bullying, it will not work, it has got nothing to do with school uniforms. It is all about education: education is far more important than legislation.

The government talks about buying a uniform, reducing the cost of clothing for parents. That is not so. Parents still have to buy clothes for students to wear over weekends. Do you know that some schools actually make a profit from their uniforms? They actually get a kickback from selling a uniform to students. Those students who have got a full school uniform, including a blazer, know how expensive it is, especially when it includes a school logo. A normal shirt can be purchased for \$10, but by putting the school logo onto the shirt, it costs perhaps \$60. Part of that amount will go back to the school. Are we there to make a profit or are we there to educate our students?

Finally, the government claims it is all about consultation, but it is forcing schools who have decided not to have a school uniform policy to go out to the community, consult with them again, in the hope that they change the policy. On the one hand the government says it is up to individuals to do this but on the other hand it wants them to consult the community and come back with a compulsory school uniform. You cannot have it both ways.

I ask you to read the bill very carefully and decide whether this bill does what the government claims it can or whether it needs some amendments brought in to improve the bill. For example, should you expel students from school? If children go to a particular school because they like that school, part of the acceptance of that school is that they have to wear a school uniform. They cannot change around after two days and say, 'I want to wear casual clothes'. Perhaps some amendments are needed.

As the bill stands, it is not workable, the government has failed to deliver, and I hope the backbenchers on the government side will, for once, stand up to the government, to the minister and to the Premier, unlike previous occasions when those members have just sat there and taken what the minister has said. Members have been

elected to Parliament to ensure that they look after the constituents in their electorates. Members are serving their electorates, not the ministers or the Premier.

I urge members to make sure that this bill, as it stands, fails. If members wish to improve it, then bring in some amendments, make it workable and make it better.

The CHAIR — I thank the member for Bulleen. I emphasise at this point that the two speeches that have been made do not represent the actual views of the government or the opposition, and of course this inquiry has not formed a view about uniforms as yet; that is why you, the students, are here — to give us extra input in regard to that.

After today we will be compiling all of the information that has been brought to us, the committee will then be seriously considering those views that have been put. We will then develop our report and present our recommendations as we see fit, following that. Do not be misled by the enthusiasm with which the members for Eltham and Bulleen have spoken today.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3

The CHAIR — We will move to clause 3, headed ‘Schools to establish uniform policy’. I call for speakers on this clause.

Mr TREW — Apollo Bay College supports clause 3 (1). We fully support this aspect of the clause. We largely support the remainder of the clause with a few exceptions, including the word ‘tradition’ in (2)(a).

Students at Apollo Bay college are worried about the wording of this as it may be used to set stronger uniform policies, such as blazers, where Apollo Bay uses a more casual uniform policy. The shirt I am wearing is standard uniform. We do not have anything more than that. The rest of (2) is fine, and we have no problem with it.

The students at Apollo Bay college completely (3) as we feel it is the student’s personal right to do everything in that area, and it is not the government’s duty to mandate what a student can and cannot do in those areas.

We fully support (4), and we applaud the government for including (5) in the bill, which we feel is an excellent addition because it is about time teachers also had a uniform policy.

Miss SHEMER — At Balwyn High School we strongly believe that the uniform is an integral facet of our school community. Not only does it provide a sense of unity and pride, but if a student believes they are part of a close-knit network — in this case, a school — we believe they will be more inclined to take part in the activities that the school has to offer. For example, a footballer like Nick Riewoldt, wearing the St Kilda uniform, will really feel part of that team, and therefore his uniform will create a sense of intrinsic motivation and the will to succeed or achieve.

Our school provides its students with a uniform code which they are expected to follow upon entry to the school. They do, however, have some choice in what they can wear. For instance, the girls can choose between socks and tights or a dress and a winter uniform. We think that this bit of leeway is really important in making the students feel as though they also have a voice.

Personally I believe that having a uniform is imperative — for example, for safety reasons. It is important for students to wear their uniform to and from school so they are identifiable within the community. Also from a more positive aspect, if they make an achievement, it can then be attributed somewhat to the school.

In today’s society it is also crucial that students have their own identities. School is a place to be oneself and express an opinion, and therefore students should be allowed to be and feel unique. In relation to hair being dyed an unnatural colour, we believe that as long as it does not detract from the overall presentation and reputation of the school, it should be allowed.

The provision should probably apply to clean-shaven male students. However, we think that if they are unable to shave for religious reasons, this should be accepted and respected within the school community.

Wearing a uniform may also eliminate the possibility of segregation and discrimination within the school. If one student is unable to afford the latest brand names or trends, it could create division between them and their peers. A uniform also looks very professional and, if worn correctly, can create an overwhelming sense of togetherness within a school.

After much discussion with my fellow peers, we believe that to reach an optimum level of effective communication between students, teachers and the principal's team, all members of the school community should wear a uniform of some sort. After observing both the advantages and disadvantages of wearing a uniform, we feel it is essential to wear one to promote pride and harmony, but above all, unity. Thank you.

Mr HOWELLS — A uniform can give the student of a school a sense of pride and belonging, thus not having a uniform may be seen as having a lack of pride and belonging. My school, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, has a population of over 1800 students. The college differs from most secondary colleges in that it only caters for students completing years 11 and 12 in VCE, VET or VCAL.

Bendigo Senior has an adult learning environment and this is reflected by the school not having a uniform policy. However, students must comply with the college dress code. The code allows students to wear anything they like as long as it does not carry an offensive message and is not too brief. Closed-toe shoes must be worn for VET students and students of technology or science subjects.

Students recognise and value the untraditional privilege they are being given, and the dress code is rarely if ever breached. At Bendigo Senior, whilst not having a uniform, in return students feel further integrated into the community as young adults. Implementing a uniform policy would put a large financial burden on families, many of whom are from outlying areas or lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This is a pressure that would be unnecessary as students only attend in their final years of schooling — in some cases just one year.

School merchandise, including rugby tops, hooded jumpers, shirts, caps and the like are sold by the student council. Proceeds are returned to the student council as capital to run events throughout the year, such as live bands and food stalls, which all meet with large support from both students and teachers. As it currently stands, schools are autonomous in making decisions over school uniform and dress code policies. Ideally, this is a decision that should be kept within individual schools. However, the introduction of a bill such as the one being considered today has the capacity to give all schools consistent direction in how they implement a uniform or dress code policy. It must be noted that it is simply unrealistic to require all schools to enforce a compulsory uniform. Thanks.

Miss FORREST — Today I will be speaking against this bill. Uniform comes from 'uni', to be united or as one, and 'form'. Since students come in so many different forms, a uniform needs to cater to all of them — different sizes, different racial backgrounds, hair colour, skin colour. It is impossible to cater to all these differences, so the best uniform policy is actually to have no uniforms at all and instead to have neat, casual, non-offensive clothing of the student's choice.

We believe that uniforms are outdated and sexist, cause interschool discrimination and abolish individualism, and therefore have no place in Victorian high schools. School uniforms diminish students' creative outlet through fashion, abolish individualism and force them to conform to very often an unattractive, boring, uninspiring uniform.

Any forms of individualism, such as piercings or unnatural hair colours, are abolished by this bill; there must be no tattoos and no make-up. It almost sounds like the requirements of a military uniform. But high school is not a military operation; high school is an important time of self-reflection and discovery, being creative and opening our minds. People claim that uniforms will get rid of intra-school discrimination — that is, only cool kids can afford designer clothing. But in a situation where uniforms are compulsory, the hierarchy is simply developed on how you wear your uniform — how short your skirt is, how many badges you have on your collar.

In high school people form groups with people of similar interests. Without the free choice in clothing, it is still going to happen. Clothing is a visual representation of who you are. That is why cliques are formed on this basis. If you take away the free dress, groups are always going to be formed. There will always be bullying in high schools. We at University High School, as a non-uniform school, can tell you that our school is very accepting.

What people do not realise is that having uniforms causes interschool discrimination — that is, unnecessary tension between schools. This can even lead to religious discrimination between non-Catholic and Catholic schools, for example. This could be limited by allowing students to travel to and from school in casual dress. But high schools

establish unnecessary rules whereby just taking off your tie when on the train going home will land you in detention. No, students must travel to and from school in uniform!

Uniforms are also severely outdated. What type of world do we live in where girls sometimes are not even allowed to wear pants? Do you realise how cold it gets on public transport at 7.30 a.m. when you are only wearing tights? What is it with boys not being allowed to have their hair longer than the collar? That is not only sexist, it is archaic.

Another argument in favour of uniforms is that it minimises distractions within the classroom and keeps the focus on work and the teacher. We at the University High School believe that it is in fact the opposite. Distractions in class are not caused by what you wear but what you do, like chatting, gossiping and throwing papers. We believe that when students are forced to wear clothing they do not like, specifically a uniform, this just exacerbates the problem and makes them more likely to rebel and cause distractions in class. Current evidence shows that non-uniformed schools are performing just as well as uniformed schools in VCE scores.

The CHAIR — The member's time has expired. That was a very passionate contribution from the member from University High School. We now move to the opportunity to make amendments. I understand a representative from Eltham High School has an amendment?

Miss VENDRAMINI — Yes. I move:

1. That clause 3(1) be amended:

replace the words 'schools are required to establish a uniform policy' with 'schools which choose to establish a uniform policy'.

The amendment aims to rationalise the bill to permit schools to make their own decision regarding the right to implement a uniform policy. Our aim is to change the bill from a centralised control of dress code policy for schools to a normalisation of existing policies at uniformed schools, therefore removing extremes in disciplinary methods et cetera.

The CHAIR — I understand a representative from Bendigo Senior Secondary School might like to speak to that amendment.

Mr BUTLER — Our school abolished its uniform 30 years ago. We agree with Eltham High School, that wearing a uniform really must be an individual school decision. If the government were to decide that our school had to have a school uniform, how would they enforce it? Would they march in the door and arrest the principal if we did not introduce one? I can assure you of the commitment of the principal and most of the staff and students — and may I add that 40 of our staff are ex-students — to the school the way it is.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr GREIG — I move:

2. that clause 3(3) be amended:

omit the words 'students do not wear make-up' and the words 'male students are clean shaven'.

We believe that students should be permitted to wear make-up as people can feel self-conscious and school may not be a positive experience for them. Students with irritations, blemishes or allergies may feel self-conscious if they are not allowed to wear basic make-up to cover these irritations.

Every person, including a student, has the right to feel comfortable in their appearance. This same principle applies to males, who instead of applying make-up should be allowed to grow facial hair to cover these irritations. Students, however, have no need to apply excessive make-up, such as lipstick or excessive foundation. Again, excessive facial hair, such as a moustache, is also not necessary. Students have a right to wear make-up and grow facial hair to ensure that their education does not suffer from a reduced sense of comfort at school.

Miss VENDRAMINI — I would like to talk about clause 3(3)(a) which states that students' hair should not be dyed an unnatural colour. Balwyn High brought up an excellent point — that if students' hair is dyed an unnatural colour but it does not affect the running of the classroom or offend any other students, then it should be permitted.

I would also like to ask how an ‘unnatural’ hair colour — which I find quite difficult to define — is any different from make-up and facial hair as self-expression or as a means of addressing self-consciousness and increasing confidence?

The CHAIR — That contribution was not specifically on the amendment but it was clearly on the issue, so I allowed the point of the discussion.

Amendment agreed to.

The CHAIR — There is an opportunity for committee members at this point to ask questions of the chamber students and anybody who wishes to respond to them can rise and do so. Are there any questions from our committee?

Mr KOTSIRAS — I would like to ask those who have a school uniform what they like about it. What is it that you like about the current school uniform that you have?

Ms FORTE — Our uniform is quite varied so there is a range of what we can wear. I like it being varied because we can still express ourselves with the choices we have.

The CHAIR — Is there anybody else wishing to put a view about why they like the uniform they have got?

Mr WILLIAMS — I think that actually it can save you money. The real designer clothes now, like pairs of jeans that you see in the paper, can be over \$200. So over five days you need five days worth of brand-new fashionable clothes in order to fit in, whereas with a uniform you only need to buy one and it can last you a whole year.

Mr HERBERT — My question is to schools who do not have uniforms. It is a two-part question. Firstly, what are the school regulations or rules about sun safety? And secondly, what about sporting uniforms — do the schools that do not have normal uniforms have sports uniforms, and is that policy adhered to?

Miss MILDENHALL — For our PE (physical education) classes we all have to wear a collared polo top but we are allowed to wear anything that you can freely move in. With the non-school uniform policy we do like to express ourselves a little bit and wear shorts that go to the thighs and not tracksuit pants that have any logos on them.

Miss FORREST — In answer to your question about sun safety, we are educated about it in health classes and there is free sunscreen available from all schools. We are encouraged to wear hats, although it is not compulsory, because we believe students should be educated enough to make decisions for themselves. With regard to sports uniforms — it is pretty obvious that when you play basketball you need to be able to differentiate between teams, so inter-school sports competitions seem to be defined by them. Also it is a health and safety issue — when you play sports you get sweaty, so it is a good idea to change clothes.

Miss SHERIDAN — We do not really have a sports uniform. We wear whatever we want and it is recommended to bring a change of clothes — whatever is comfortable. We are not allowed to wear offensive language on our T-shirts or anything too revealing.

The CHAIR — SunSmart?

Miss SHERIDAN — Our school is basically all under cover and no-one really goes outside unless they are going down the street.

The CHAIR — It is pretty cold in Ballarat, isn't it, so you stay inside most of the time?

Mr HUDSON — At our school we have uniforms when we feel uniforms serve a purpose, which is the case with sporting teams, as University High has pointed out; in the music department — if students are performing at another school or in a venue outside the school, it is important that they can recognise each other and be easily identifiable.

With regards to sun safety our school has undercover areas. We are educated in sun safety but we feel it is the students' responsibility and we trust our students' judgements. We know the risks of sun exposure and we look after ourselves; we are not out there trying to get cancer. So our school places some responsibility on the students but educates us on the matter.

Mr HERBERT — I have a question for those students who indicated it is a matter of student choice and that you educate students about it. Do you think there is a difference in primary schools? The work of this committee is to inquire and recommend about uniforms for all Victorian schools. Do you think the case in terms of SunSmart clothing and students' choice in education should apply to primary school students as well?

Miss MILDENHALL — At my primary school, Footscray Primary School, it was compulsory for every student to wear a sunhat and have sunscreen on in terms 1 and 4, making sure that every student was free from the sun.

The CHAIR — So you accept that it is reasonable to make it compulsory at the primary school level?

Miss MILDENHALL — Yes, but not in high school, because we have lives to live!

Mr HUDSON — I think it is more acceptable in primary schools because it sets good habits in terms of education — we all remember the Slip, Slop, Slap program — but as students mature, with these good habits set, you can leave it more to the students' discretion. I do not think legislation needs to be made for primary schools; you could well set up advisory committees, as already exist, and leave it to schools to set their own policies. They may choose to make hats compulsory, and that may be a good policy for primary schools, but I do not think it requires state legislation.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Without naming any teachers, do you think teachers are good role models in terms of how they dress when they come to school?

Mr HOWELLS — No.

The CHAIR — So that is a general no?

Mr WOOD — I think teachers dress in a fashion that is suitable for schooling. They either wear suits for a profession or they wear casual clothes, like everyone else.

Mr TOMS — We believe that some teachers do not dress appropriately for their choice of work and some do, but there are no guidelines, so that needs to be addressed.

The CHAIR — There seems to be a bit of enthusiasm about that.

Miss PUMPA — I think teachers at Collingwood College are just as bold as students in the way they dress. They are just as great as the students at expressing their opinions.

Amended clause agreed to.

Clause 4

Miss MULLAN — School policies and rules are just like laws; in order for these policies to work, they must be able to be enforced. This means setting up measures to implement to make sure these policies or rules are followed. The policy must also encompass the views and values of the community. The bill we are discussing concerns policies in schools on uniforms. Therefore the community we are talking about is the school community, which includes all key stakeholders — for example, students, teachers and parents.

A school must have a clear and defined uniform policy. It needs to incorporate all aspects, including the enforcement and disciplinary measures the school will take to ensure the policy is followed. All potential students and their parents or guardians need to be made aware of the policy before students are enrolled. This might be done with a contract before they come into the school. This would create a strong awareness of the school's expectations regarding the uniform policy.

Enforcement of the uniform policy should not involve measures that would adversely affect a student's learning, such as withdrawal from class, suspension or expulsion — which is stipulated in subclause 6. These measures would better suit a more serious breach of rules, such as bullying. Enforcement procedures that are deemed inappropriate will not be accepted. They will cause resistance, and therefore the uniform policy will not be followed. Disciplinary measures that would be deemed appropriate are things such as verbal reminders to students, detention or communication with parents. These measures are widely accepted in schools that have uniforms, because that is what they have already. They are easier to enforce, and they therefore reduce rebellion against uniform policies.

All of these aspects should be considered when enforcing uniform policies — seriousness and frequency — but teacher relationships should not be. At the end of the day, a teacher-student relationship involves teaching and learning. It is a professional relationship. They are not there to be your best friend, and therefore should not have to think twice when enforcing a uniform policy.

Mr BAKER — I would like to thank the committee for allowing us to contribute to the new clauses.

Our allocated clause — no. 4 — deals with the enforcement of the uniform policy. We found this to be mostly satisfactory, with the exception of a few points that we will discuss. Clause 4(1) states that all students must be in correct uniform at all times as specified in clause 3.4. These are:

- (a) during school hours;
- (b) while travelling to and from school; and
- (c) during school activities out of school hours.

We felt that travelling to and from school should only apply to students using school-provided transport. Students walking or getting a lift with parents are no longer in school jurisdiction so should no longer have to wear school uniform.

We would also like to bring to your attention clause 4(7), which states:

Where possible, teachers may confiscate items worn by students which do not comply with the uniform policy. Confiscated items must be returned to the students no later than the end of the term.

We find the period of time over which a confiscated item may be kept unnecessary and illogical. The purpose of confiscation in this situation is to temporarily remove the item if it is unacceptable attire, it has been taken from the classroom because it is too dangerous or distracting and therefore, in this purpose, needs to be taken for only a short time.

We think that an item may be confiscated until, but not after, the weekend. This allows a suitable amount of time for the actions to take effect on the student. In the case of a confiscation at the end of the week, the two-day period of absence — Saturday and Sunday — replaces the disciplinary benefits of confiscation by removing the item from the classroom. We think that in this way, both teachers and students will be happy with the methods of action.

We specifically like clauses 4 (10) and 4 (9). These state that the students may only be withdrawn from the class if the attire is unsafe and causes a risk to others' safety. If a student is withdrawn, materials might be provided to ensure their learning is not compromised. We agree with the principle of students' health before uniform and would like to see this clause contribute to the final draft. We also agree with the requirement that teachers are to ensure learning is not compromised. This removes any desire for a student to be withdrawn from class, and also ensures that students are at no academic disadvantage for unacceptable attire. Although we had a few problems with this clause, we found that most of it was appropriate.

Mr NYAGUY — I am speaking about what I believe about the policy to be right and the correct appearance of it. We at Sandringham College strongly believe that schools throughout the entire state should have a universal dress code in enforcement. I find that if we are going to have a policy that is statewide, it needs to be equal and all schools need to be following the same dress code. I think it is impossible to have an equal dress code and say it is an equal dress code if students at, say, Melbourne High are wearing blazers and students at University High are wearing casual. It just does not work.

There should be different punishments depending on the importance or the part of uniform which has been not worn correctly. If the wearing of a piece of incorrect uniform can be dealt with immediately — like earrings or piercings — they should be simply taken out and no punishment should be given unless the student continues to wear it. After the student has had a few warnings, there should be detentions, and they should increase over time, and parents should also be notified.

We believe that, whether students have a good or bad track record, the punishment should remain the same, unless of course it is the same piece of uniform that has been worn incorrectly. Consistency is very important. We also believe that students should never miss out on an academic class if they are wearing incorrect uniform. Uniform is merely something to be worn at school and it should not impact on education. It is acceptable, though, that students who are not wearing the correct PE uniform miss out on PE or students wearing incorrect, say, art uniform miss out on that lesson.

In our school we recognise that it is important to enforce the use of school uniform, but perhaps it is not as well executed as it could be. Uniform passes are available if parents provide a note explaining why the uniform is incorrect; however, these passes are limited and the students will have to fix the uniform fault in time.

The enforcement of the uniform is not set in stone. Some teachers are lenient in the discipline, and others enforce the policy brutally. Also, the student is another variable in enforcement equalisation. If the student has a good track record, the teacher may let it slide. On the other side of the coin, if a student has been wearing an incorrect uniform and has continued to do so for a period of time, a teacher might be much more brutal or punish them more severely. In some extreme cases students have been sent home because their uniform has been drastically incorrect for a long time.

Mr DEEGAN — We believe that wearing a school uniform does affect a student's behaviour. Wearing a school uniform communicates a positive overall image of the school to the surrounding community. It encourages a sense of ownership and pride in the school we attend. It also sets boundaries between school, home, work and leisure. Once a student puts on a school uniform, they are in school mode; once they take the school uniform off, they are in home or leisure mode. It helps to keep students in an appropriate frame of mind during the school day. Uniform also helps to make everybody equal and eradicates competition in areas such as fashion and social class.

Our uniform has been agreed on by all levels of the school community, including staff, students, parents and other relevant school committees. The uniform policy should be enforced to ensure that a learning environment is maintained. The uniform policy should also be enforced to ensure that students show respect for their school and promote a positive image to the wider community. Enforcing the uniform policy also assists teaching staff in identifying students when on excursions and camps, thus increasing the safety of students.

We believe that students who break the uniform policy normally are just lazy, although we do recognise that there are other reasons for breaching the uniform policy. We recognise that some students and their families may be having financial difficulties and are not able to afford the school uniform. We also understand that some students and their families may be experiencing hardship — for example, a family member has died or is severely ill.

The school is responsible for assisting students in such positions in the best way possible. We also realise that some students may have just moved house and uniforms are still packed away, or a student's family may not be supportive of the uniform policy. In such situations the school is responsible for coming to an agreement with the student and their family. We believe punishments for students who are out of uniform should be different to punishments for other types of student behaviour. The punishments should not be as severe as punishments used for more serious student behaviour, and they should not disrupt the learning of these students or others.

If a student continually comes to school in clothing other than the set uniform, the parents should be contacted and a meeting arranged to solve the issue. Enforcing uniform policy will inevitably cause both disrespect and conflict between students and teachers. The effect then of enforcing the uniform policy on the relationship between the student and the teacher will come down to a particular student's behaviour and mindset. As most people would agree, avoiding conflict between students and teachers is the main priority. However, the primary relationship between the student and the teacher should remain professional in nature.

We believe teachers should not be spending a great deal of time dealing with students who are out of uniform. At Warragul Regional College we use the home group to arrange uniform passes and disciplinary measures for students who are out of uniform.

The CHAIR — The member's time has expired.

Mr CLOSE — I move:

3. That clause 4(3) be amended:

omit the words 'the likely impact on teacher/student relationships.'

First of all, the main aim of the clause is to enforce the policy that is efficient and effective for schools, not to maintain a healthy relationship between students and teachers, and this takes away from it.

Secondly, as I said before, the relationship should be professional and should not be social. Having this policy makes the teachers feel compromised in making decisions. Finally, balancing the social aspect makes it hard for a teacher to find the right policy that maintains the right relationship. This really takes away from the whole clause, and this is why this clause should be amended.

Miss MILDENHALL — There is one teacher at school who helps me in a very social way but not in such a professional way. I walk into his English office, and he will say, 'What's going on, Sinead?', and I will say, 'Johnny, I feel so bad. I am going to this weird parliamentary thing, and there is all these people, and they are going to talk about these strange things that I have no idea about'. He will say, 'You want some coffee? Okay'. Then he will go on to tell me about his children, and then within 5 minutes, all of a sudden, what do you know? He has come out with all this stuff about uniforms.

You say, 'Gee, Johnny, I didn't know you knew so much about all this stuff', and he will say, 'Well, I have been against it for the whole school for the past 25 years. Anything else?'. I will say, 'No, Johnny, thank you' and walk out. And he will say, 'Anytime'. So I rather like the social side of it and not the professional. Thank you.

Amendment defeated.

Miss YOUNG — I move:

4. That the words "withdrawal from privileges, e.g. excursions" be inserted into clause 4(4), below clause 4(4)(d).

We at Warragul Regional College believe everyday classes should not be affected, but we also believe if privileges such as extracurricular activities are removed when students are not wearing their uniform, it may help to deter them from not doing it again.

Miss FORREST — I personally believe excursions are very important learning paths that allow students to embrace another way of learning, such as going to a French cafe, to say, 'Parlez vous Français?' or something like that. It is a very important part of learning to realise that you can learn out of the classroom situation.

The CHAIR — So you are speaking against the amendment?

Miss FORREST — Yes.

Miss LONGMUIR — The excursion could be to do with classes. Clause 3 — possibly, I am not quite sure — says that a uniform cannot affect your learning. If it is to do with an excursion to do with a certain subject, a certain class, getting taken away from that because of something you are not wearing could affect your learning. Therefore I do not really agree with this either.

Amendment defeated.

Miss LLOYD — I move:

5. That clause 4(7), which pertains to the confiscation of items which do not comply with the uniform policy, be omitted.

For example, if a student is wearing an inappropriate jacket, and the teacher asks the student to remove the jacket and put it away, the teacher should then find an appropriate replacement for the student to wear for the rest of the day, if they so request.

Miss MULLAN — Regarding confiscation, it should be allowed for certain additional items, therefore a jacket that does not comply should not be worn. The students know that confiscation is a disciplinary action, and therefore nothing should be given back for them to redeem the jacket loss.

With inappropriate things, such as taking other people's trousers or something ridiculous like that, yes, confiscation should not happen; but when it is something like scarves that might be inappropriate, or a jacket or jumper underneath a uniform, then it should be confiscated.

The CHAIR — Thank you for speaking against the amendment.

Mr ROSEN — In clause 4(7) it says that when the item is confiscated, it can be returned at the end of the term. I think a term is too long for an item to remain confiscated. If someone brings to school something inappropriate or that is distracting on the first day, it is a bit long to have the item confiscated for the whole term. The item might be needed at home or for other reasons. It should be a much shorter period, possibly until the end of the week. I am not sure which school said that, but it was mentioned by the first school.

The CHAIR — I note that means you are not necessarily speaking for or against the amendment, or you could stay with that amendment, because the wording was that it be 'no later than the end of term'. You could still be in support of leaving subclause (7) in the bill?

Mr TOMS — We believe that confiscating items is stripping away basic human rights. How do we know that when we leave something with a teacher, we will get it back in good condition or the way it was before?

The CHAIR — Do you think the teachers are going to be wearing this fancy jewellery? I hope you have made up your minds. The amendment as put is to remove subclause (7) altogether, so if you vote for the amendment, you vote to remove subclause (7).

Amendment defeated.

The CHAIR — That amendment is lost and subclause (7) remains in the bill. Some of the committee members may wish to ask questions.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I hear you say you believe in the rights and privileges of students, but I do not hear much about responsibilities. You all know about the rules. I am not talking about whether the school has a uniform policy or not, but if you attend a school that has such a policy, then should you not wear that uniform? If you do not wear the uniform — and this is the question — do you believe that the school should have the right to take you out of a classroom until you wear the school uniform?

Mr ROSEN — I believe that if someone decides not to wear the school uniform, although taking them out of class could mean they would miss out on work and it might be what they want, it is probably better than, say, getting parents to come and collect them because that would also mean missing class. It would also involve the parents, which means that if the parents have jobs, they would not be able to come and do that. It is probably better to take the student out of class for punishment.

Mr GREIG — I will be later addressing this issue with amendment 10 — that students should be removed from classes, but not from their learning environment. They should continue to learn but in a non-disruptive environment that does not affect other students.

Miss HAJNCL — I believe that students should be kept in class because they need to learn. I do not think a uniform is such an important matter that they would be taken out of the class.

Mr HERBERT — Do those who support uniforms think there should be a bit of flexibility? For instance, if it is a really wintry day, should students be allowed to have some ski-type overcoats? I noticed that most of the students here today have jackets and some have jumpers, but I do not know how warm they would be on very cold days.

Likewise, with footwear; most schools have footwear and I notice that girls tend to wear sandals of sorts. Should there be flexibility, so that if it is a really wet, wintry day, they could be allowed to wear other shoes? I raise that issue of flexibility.

Miss ARMSTRONG — I believe that there should be flexibility in the school uniforms where schools choose to have a uniform. I have a friend who goes to Blackburn High; she says that during the winter her blazer is not sufficient warmth for her, whereas teachers are able to wear scarves, gloves, whatever they really want — because they are teachers — and she feels it is unfair to her rights as a student, and in the education system she should be allowed to wear what she wants.

The CHAIR — Is there somebody from a school that wears a uniform in regard to that? Is that an issue?

Mr HARVEY — I personally believe there should be a small amount of flexibility. During this last winter, which I found quite cold, on the way to and from school when it was cold I wore a scarf, gloves and a large overcoat over my blazer which would keep me warm, but during school hours and while I was at school I was required to take them off, which I believe is sufficient flexibility, because in a school environment, if there is a heating system there, the outside weather conditions should not affect you enough to make it necessary to wear extra uniform items.

The CHAIR — But your school allows to you wear that extra clothing to school or from school?

Mr HARVEY — To school.

Miss FORTE — I think there should be flexibility with the uniform as long as it does not compromise safety. In summer I do not think people should be going around wearing thongs when their feet can be harmed, but at the same time in winter I had a friend who wore gumboots and got punished for wearing them to school when it was wet and rainy. I do not think, if it is going to compromise safety, flexibility should be allowed.

The CHAIR — So you think the gumboots should have been on?

Miss FORTE — They should have been allowed.

The CHAIR — Any other circumstance — for example, rugging up? Was there any time when your school has not allowed you to rug up?

Miss FORTE — I think it is important that we can wear warm clothes because otherwise we are going to get a cold anyway.

The CHAIR — We will leave that question. Any other questions from the committee members?

Can anybody tell me occasions when they think their school has been too strict in the way the uniform has been enforced in your school?

Mr DUBBELD — Recently our school has started to crack down on socks. The school rules are that we are to wear white socks. Before recent times it was only to be enforced if the socks were to be seen, as in above the shoes or if you were wearing shorts. Recently our teachers decided they would crack down properly. They have been going through mainly the younger year levels and getting them to take off their shoes to make sure they do not have colours, stripes or symbols on their socks, even below the shoe lines, and even those who wear pants.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that example.

Miss MARDLING — Only a few months ago we went on an excursion to the city. It was a wintry, very cold, rainy day. We were on the train platform with our teachers and a friend of mine was wearing gumboots, and they did say you were allowed to wear any casual shoes, and the teacher came up to her and said, ‘You have to take them off right now and go straight home’, so she had to do that, and I think that was totally and utterly unfair.

The CHAIR — We will take one more example of this from Lowanna.

Mr WOOD — Because it was really damn cold in winter, we were allowed to wear jackets over the top of our uniform as long as we were wearing jumpers. We were in class. Because we have got crappy electronic heating units which are dented and crap because everyone thrashes them we were wearing our jackets, and the teachers made us take them off and said we would get suspended for not complying with the uniform rules, but it does state that we are allowed to wear them over the top.

Mr WRIGHT — Our teachers, because these clothes are not sufficient, we get cold on cold days and we wear overcoats, and they are cracking down on us, saying we are not allowed to, but we are not allowed to stay inside, and it gets really cold outside, and there aren't any heaters anywhere, and it gets really cold. They are making us wear less clothing so we cannot keep warm.

The CHAIR — I can see the member for Eltham raised a thorny issue when he raised that one about wearing additional clothing and so on.

We might leave the discussion on clause 4 there and put clause 4 to the vote. I trust you are ready to vote on that. You will note that the three amendments that were put were all lost, so the clause that you will be voting on is the full clause unamended.

Clause agreed to.

Clause 5

Miss PITTARD — Firstly, I would like to state that my fellow school students will also be speaking, as Barkly campus of Ballarat Secondary College believes everybody has the right to have a voice.

Our uniform policy requires clothing that is not revealing and has no offensive symbols, and thongs, are not allowed. At the two junior campuses, years 7–10, all students must participate in science and technology classes, therefore they require fully leather, closed shoes. However, at Barkly campus subjects are not enforced, so students who do not participate in these subjects should not have to limit their footwear or limit their jewellery; it is a big generalisation. Also, the majority of our campus is indoors, so buying broad-rimmed hats, UV protective sunglasses and having elbow-length sleeves is not a necessity.

Miss SHERIDAN — Being allowed to wear casual clothes can lead us to getting bullied, but this is not because of what we are wearing. With our school's lenient mobile phone policy, it is easy for students to organise and get people in to bully other students. Teachers cannot distinctly tell students from others, leading to lack of safety for students. When out on excursions, it is hard to tell who we are, unlike at junior campuses. Although it is hard to tell, we usually go in small class sizes, and the teacher can keep track of us. We are allowed to leave school grounds at lunchtime and during study periods. Many of us go down the street, leading to us being ridiculed by shopkeepers and other shoppers. Having a uniform could also lead to this.

When in junior campus uniform we are looked down upon like we would do something really bad at any time. This is just an example of how having a uniform or not having a uniform can lead to segregation in the community.

Miss BUBY — The Ballarat Secondary College uniform consists of a long winter skirt, summer dress, a knitted jumper for girls, long pants, shorts and a windcheater for boys. The uniform policy does not specify when the uniform is to be worn, so the students can dress appropriately for the weather conditions. However, during the cold, harsh winter of Ballarat, the basic uniform does not protect students against the wind or rain, forcing their parents or the students to purchase an extra uniform item such as a spray jacket to enable a comfortable body temperature and to protect them from the outside conditions.

The Ballarat Secondary College senior campus does not require students to wear a uniform, which allows them to be independent and to make their own decisions about what they feel comfortable in.

Miss THOMAS — In 2002 Ballarat Secondary College junior campuses, East and Wendouree, brought in a new sports uniform, which consists of a polo shirt and lightweight, breathable shorts with the school logo. This enables students to move freely and without great resistance. At the Barkly senior campus there is not set uniform for sport or PE classes as the majority of the study is either theory or elected by a small minority of students.

The CHAIR — The members' time has expired.

Miss PUMPA — At Collingwood College it is a rule that students are not permitted to wear thongs during sports, cooking or woodwork or sciences. If students appear at these classes wearing thongs, they are not permitted to enter the class until they change into closed-toed shoes.

Jewellery can be an expression of the student's personality, creativity and artistic flavour. Students should be allowed to wear jewellery as long as the jewellery is not offensive or a hazard to any of the classes. Also, depending on the teacher, jewellery can be removed easily without discussion.

We agree that students should wear comfortable clothes, but for all students to dress the same, with or without uniform, is taking away any sort of individuality or artistic creativity towards fashion that students may have. Dressing the same does not enable students to make bold statements towards showing their ideas and personality.

At Collingwood College you do not have to wear a uniform or wear the same thing as everyone else to feel proud of being a part of the community. For those people who think that you have to wear the newest labels or the most fashionable clothes to be cool, it is not true. You can be wearing anything you want at Collingwood College. If you wear black, you are not a nemo. It is untrue to think that you are put in a group because of you what you wear; it is personality that matters at Collingwood College.

In relation to the issue of a uniform that is appropriate for all weather, it is different for all people and their body types. Therefore, we believe that students may become uncomfortable with a uniform, and they may change the presentation of the uniform, which demoralises the point of having the uniform in the first place.

Students should be able to dress themselves for their sport and be comfortable for whatever body type or fitness they are. All students have different fitness types, which means they need different outfits. Therefore it is a bit hard for every student to have the same uniform in sport, and this could be frustrating. It is also frustrating if they do not have changing rooms and you have to change into a sports uniform. It could be uncomfortable for students.

Mr LOMAX — At Collingwood College, closed or covered shoes must be worn to all technology classes, which are food, wood, PE and science. Secondary students should have a choice to wear wide-brimmed hat, with the school supporting their decision. Students wearing glasses may also find it difficult to wear protective glasses over the ones they are wearing. Also, the wearing of long sleeves can become a comfort issue in the hot summer.

Mr CLEARWATER — I would firstly like to say that Melbourne High School has a strong tradition behind its uniform, and it is very widely recognised uniform. We feel that this uniform allows members of the public to identify the school and hence enhance the school's image and the esteem that students themselves will hold in the school. As such, we broadly support the objectives of this uniform policy and broadly support the objectives of this particular clause.

However, in its current form we cannot support the clause. The first part of the clause is acceptable. We would like to emphasise that thongs may be acceptable in some circumstances, such as around swimming pools, but that is a minor issue. However, we recognise the importance of the autonomy of schools in deciding what their uniform should consist of and in allowing for student choice. That is why we feel that subclause (2) is inappropriate.

I believe Kyneton Secondary College will be moving an amendment to the bill that would oblige only primary school students to wear broad brimmed and legionnaire style hats and UV (ultraviolet) protective sunglasses. We feel that while it is very important that primary school students learn these habits, secondary school students should have the choice, particularly given that at Melbourne High school and many other schools there are substantial covered areas in which wearing hats would not be appropriate. We cannot support this clause without that amendment.

To move on to subclause (3), requiring that uniforms make it easy to identify students as being from a school — as I have said, this is very important, for health and safety reasons, for students' esteem and pride in their uniform and for the school's image.

With regard to local weather conditions, our school has two different school uniforms — one for summer and one for winter. Although some of my compatriots are not happy that both summer and winter uniforms require the blazer, the two uniforms account for the variance in climate, and I personally feel that the school uniform does provide enough in terms of warmth and does provide enough flexibility for students to be able to choose the most appropriate uniform for the day's weather.

As for physical education, obviously we must encourage physical education, and sports uniforms can do this. Sports uniforms are also important in building the emotional wellbeing and esteem of students at inter-school

sporting carnivals et cetera. To conclude, we fully support compulsory school uniforms but would like that element of choice when it comes to the wearing of SunSmart devices.

Mr WRIGHT — We believe that it is vital for students to have a choice when it comes to selecting what uniform pieces they wear. For example, some students might feel insecure if shorts were the only uniform choice available for summer. Having a selection of uniform items helps students to adhere to student uniform policy, thus ensuring the clothing will keep them relatively cool in summer and warm in winter. Comfort and protection should be a main aim of the school uniform. These two issues are equally important. If a student is continually trying to make themselves comfortable because of materials used to make the uniform, it will distract the student from important schoolwork.

The uniform worn by the students attending our school and other schools in the Geelong region values the safety of the student above how fashionable it looks. Some safety features of our uniform are that we are required to wear closed-toed shoes when doing practical work. The only body piercing we are allowed is to wear one pair of earrings, either studs or sleepers. Eyebrow piercings or hoops can be caught while doing practical work or physical education, causing unnecessary pain and suffering.

We believe that the uniform should have to be worn at a required length. Some students wear dresses too short, which increases the risk of sunburn, and some wear their pants too long, which causes the cuffs to drag on the ground and rip, thus causing them to trip over and injure themselves or the people around them. Some students suffer from allergies caused by the materials used in the manufacture of the uniforms, therefore there should be flexibility in the selection of fibres to make the uniforms, with students allowed to purchase clothing made from different materials as long as it comes within the school's requirements and has a school logo on it.

Leather shoes worn by girls cut into the sides of their feet and they end up with big blisters that are uncomfortable and sore for several weeks. Although these are minor problems and there is relief after several weeks, maybe softer leather could be used, and if this is more expensive, perhaps a government subsidy could be a solution.

We are all in favour of school uniforms because if we were allowed to wear casual clothes, we believe the rate of bullying might increase because of those students who cannot afford fashionable apparel. This could have a negative effect on those people's emotional state. We also think that some students would wear inappropriate clothing and may cause injuries to themselves or other people.

Having a school uniform is important because it allows the students to be identified. It also allows teachers to identify unauthorised people from the community who come into the school grounds.

We believe it should be made compulsory to wear protection from the sun in the summer, as our school does not enforce this. During terms 1 and 4 the school should enforce the wearing of broad-brimmed hats, sunglasses and sunscreen because during those times the students attending our school are at a greater risk of getting skin cancer.

We are in consensus that this clause covers all health and safety aspects of the wearing of uniforms. Schools should consider a policy change with regard to the compulsory wearing of hats and sunglasses.

The CHAIR — The member's time has expired.

I understand that Kyneton Secondary College has an amendment to the clause.

Mr MACKINTOSH — I move:

6. that the words 'For primary students' be inserted into the beginning of clause 5(2).

I further move:

That the following words be inserted at the end of the clause:

'For secondary students, the wearing of sun safety items must be left to the student's own choice and responsibility'.

We feel that because secondary students are almost adults they should be able to make their own choices on health and wellbeing, whereas primary students probably need a bit more guidance in what they need to do. Also with the issue of sunglasses, uniforms are meant to be used to make people seem equal. The price of sunglasses ranges from below \$20 to over \$400 and I just do not feel that that is appropriate.

Miss CODOGNOTTO — On the amendments, at Melbourne Girls College we believe that we should not risk students' health just to provide them with a choice, and we believe that it would also put the school in a vulnerable position — for example, should a student later contract skin cancer and accuse the school of not enforcing a SunSmart policy.

Mr BUTLER — Kyneton has said that students are almost adults; the fact is, at our school, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, half the students are adults — they are 18. They can drink, they can drive and they can smoke — all of which involve health risks — so it seems ridiculous that the school might say it is not their choice whether they wear a hat.

Mr SMITH — If it is left up to students to determine whether they wear SunSmart clothing, their ignorance and rebellious spirit may prevent them from wearing such items. Should the ignorance of youth be rewarded with the consequences that might come in later life?

Amendments agreed to.

Mr HERBERT — This is not mentioned in the clause, but what about the case of tattoos? It is legal for a student of, I think, 16 or older to get a tattoo with parental permission. If it is within the legal parameters, should students be able to get tattoos, and should that be an issue for school uniform policy?

Miss SHERIDAN — One my friends has a tattoo — it is on his arm. There is no policy against tattoos in my school and, quite frankly, I do not think there should be. It is a student's own choice. We wear casual clothing anyway, so people in the street do not recognise us, so they would not be putting down our school. I think a lot of people have tattoos, and it is not really in our school policy.

Mr ROSEN — Tattoos are just another kind of body art, like ear-piercing or other things. Although they are probably not recommended at our school — they are probably not allowed — I do not see why they should not be allowed, if they are somewhere that does not show. If a student has a tattoo on their bicep or somewhere near there, they should be allowed to have it. It is their choice. If they want to have it, they should be allowed to. I do not see why it should be banned if it is not imposing on the school.

Mr HOWES — A few guys at our school recently got tattoos representing their football team after it won the division 1 premiership. You know what? It does not hurt anyone. Their getting tattoos does not reflect on the school, because you cannot see the tattoos — a lot of them got them on their backs or chests; you cannot see them. It is their bond or their representation of what they are feeling. If it is not hurting anyone else, I do not see why the school feels the need to shut down their choice of expression.

The CHAIR — And the school has not taken exception in that case?

Mr HOWES — No, it has not taken exception, although that might be because it does not know. What it does not know does not hurt it.

The CHAIR — It could be. A lot of people want to speak on the tattoos issue.

Miss WATSON — I think it depends on the type of tattoo. Speaking as someone from a uniform-wearing school, it reflects on the school if the tattoo is offensive or provocative in any way — especially if it is visible. I think it should be left up to the discretion of teachers to discuss it with a student who gets a tattoo, and then there could be further disciplinary actions going on from there.

The CHAIR — The Cancer Council of Victoria suggests that sunglasses are very beneficial for people when they are outside. I am interested to hear from anyone here in regard to whether sunglasses are encouraged in your school or whether they are discouraged, and whether there is an issue with sunglasses.

Mr DUBBELD — Sunglasses are very much encouraged in summer at our school, Warragul Regional College, although only when worn appropriately. If they are worn inside or in classes, they are discouraged, and in some cases they would be confiscated, but when worn correctly there is nothing wrong with them at our school. Teachers are very much for them, and they set a good example by wearing them themselves.

The CHAIR — What percentage of students would you say wear sunglasses?

Mr DUBBELD — In the summer I would say it is about 10 per cent to 20 per cent. It varies year to year.

Miss FITZGERALD — Our school, Western Heights Secondary College, does not make sunglasses compulsory, but they are a very good idea for your eyes when in the sun. Not many people wear the sports sunglasses, but they wear more fashionable sunglasses.

Miss DEWAR — At our school, Shepparton High School, sunnies are not discouraged or encouraged. I believe that if sunnies are worn in school they become a fashion and students will try to wear them more.

The CHAIR — You think it can be misused as a practice?

Miss DEWAR — Yes, used in the wrong sense.

Mr LOMAX — I have the dress code for my school, Collingwood College. It says students are prohibited from wearing sunglasses, as they endanger health and safety.

The CHAIR — You might want to advise the school of the Cancer Council's advice. We might leave the sunglass issue.

That brings us to the point where we should vote on clause 5, which will enable us to move onto clause 6. I am putting it to you that the amendment that was put forward was agreed to, so this is the new clause 5, in which subclause (2) says that those requirements only apply to primary school students.

Amended clause agreed to.

Clause 6

The CHAIR — We have one more clause to work through before lunch — that is, clause 6, which is on your green sheet. It concerns the uniform policy as it relates to equal opportunity issues. I invite a statement in regard to that from Footscray City College.

Miss MILDENHALL — Firstly, people do not have the chances to make their own initial choices with school uniforms. They do not get a chance whether they want it or not. This is not equal to the people among Australia. I am the way I am from my experiences that have led up to this day. I have never personally worn a school uniform. I like the idea that I am different from the rest of the female 14-year-old population. I like the idea that I have had a first-hand look into the world after school, and I like the idea that my mother has stuck up for me.

She decided that school uniform was not good enough for her daughter, so she did not let me wear one. She decided that it would not help my education and was morally unethical. Why is it that no conscientious objector has the right to be conscientiously objective without their parents' permission? That is what I want to know. In my case I did not even think about how not having a school uniform would change me, but my mother did it for me, and it immediately opened me into a world of rejection and equality.

It is hard for students to get uniforms as there are many restrictions, such as time, money and religious beliefs. This makes it hard for all students around Australia to comply with the school uniform policy. This is not equal as students do not have those choices. Exemptions should count for personality, individuality and religious beliefs. Why is it that schools cannot sell burqas in school colours to accommodate religious beliefs? The school uniforms at schools around the state and country do not allow for personal beliefs.

Sadly, students can be discriminated against at school for most things these days. One major thing is burqas, or your religion — as I tried to say. People get teased and traumatised by others around them. At our school, where we have no school uniform, they are well accommodated, because everybody around them knows that it is a natural thing to wear. It can be size 175 and not be discriminated against, we understand, whereas in a place where there are school uniforms people do not understand the differences as clearly as if you have seen it first hand. People do not see and understand how discrimination can be so hurtful. This is not equal.

Finally, there is equality to others. Uniforms make students all equal until they have to buy it second hand or until they see their teachers not wearing uniforms. Students are equal only until they buy exactly the same clothes. They are equal until they see their teachers, and they are equal until they leave school. Does not a relaxed and entirely non-restrictive environment bring better results?

In conclusion, my uniform brings no equality. It has very little exemptions and spits in religion's face. Thank you very much.

Honourable members applauding.

The CHAIR — I remind members that clapping is disorderly in the house and is discouraged; however, it happens in the normal house on occasions, too, when members are quickly reminded about that.

Miss GERARD — Chair, honourable members of Parliament and ladies and gentlemen. I am here to discuss clause 6 of the uniform policy to apply equally to all students with the exemptions allowed. We agree that it is a necessary clause in a school uniform policy. It allows all students to be equal and ensures that their educational environment is safe, protected and comfortable.

A uniform policy should apply to all students, as students who are not in uniform are targets for possible discrimination. In their differing appearance and socioeconomic status there would be pressure on students trying to make sure that they are wearing the latest labels and being targeted if they are not. A uniform allows for all students to have a sense of pride and belong to their school community.

A structured uniform in place ensures that students are treated equally and do not have to cope with the stresses of wearing new cloths and having to choose what to wear in the mornings. However, we do have some points of interest within clause 6, which is headed 'Uniform policy to apply equally to all students, with exemptions allowed'. Students of different body sizes should not have different designs. It is not acceptable as it would segregate students of diverse body shapes. Why should there be separate uniforms for skinny people and larger people?

In (2) of the clause the uniform policy must allow student exemptions for the wearing of religious items. Australians are not tolerant of different nationalities and cultures. We are a non-religious school, however that should not account for the fact of students not having the right to pursue their religious beliefs.

However, we have a problem with (3) of the clause as religious items should not have to be in the school colours, as the clause states. Some official school colours are exuberant and would look inappropriate. While we agree with the majority of part 4 — that exemptions may be granted in some special circumstances — we disagree with the exemptions for students not wearing the uniform based on their body size or their emotional or behavioural difficulties.

We remain in support of subclauses (5) and (6) of this clause. In relation to subclause (7)(b) of our clause there is disagreement in the fact that students should remain in attendance at school however not be permitted to attend classes if out of correct uniform. We remain in support of (8) of this clause — that compulsory uniforms should apply equally to all students with exemptions allowed.

In conclusion we disagree that designs should be made available to suit a variety of body shapes. However, we made an exemption that religious items are to be permitted under clause 6(2), although we disagree that these religious items should not be worn in the colours of the school uniform.

Grounds for exemption should be made in the areas of physical disability and health conditions or allergies. We include that in clause 6(4)(d) and (g); body sizes and emotional or behavioural difficulties should not be factored into such exemptions. We agree it is imperative that students must attend school when they are not in correct uniform, however they may be excluded from their daytime classes. It is a vital necessity to wear uniforms because students have the right to be equal and not to be discriminated against — —

The CHAIR — The member's time has expired.

Miss CODOGNOTTO — In considering the issues raised by clause 6 we have the following statement to offer: we accept the principles guiding the clause, including the equality of all students with regard to uniform, the acceptance of religion and flexibility for catering for students with special needs. Promoting equality through the school community is vital in minimising discrimination on the basis of clothing and image. The uniform policy at Melbourne Girls College ensures that students are not defined or judged by the clothes that they wear but are celebrated for their talents and unique personalities.

Although not a problem encountered at MGC it is felt that providing equal or similar options for boys and girls is of great importance when attempting to create equality and removing divisions between the genders. The Melbourne Girls College community is proud of its cultural diversity, and we believe it is vital that the uniform policy supports this by allowing student exemptions for religious items. Despite the fact that Victorian government schools are secular, it is felt that students should be given the opportunity to express their religion within the boundaries of the school uniform policy.

We support that financial hardship should not be grounds for uniform exemption as described in clauses 6(5) and 7(4) of the bill, as it is the responsibility of the school to provide assistance, ensuring equality within the student body. The education of students is a priority. Thus it is felt that if the school and the student are unable to agree on a decision where an exemption is considered, the student must attend school. This prevents disruption to the student's schooling, which is of great importance.

At Melbourne Girls most students view the correct wearing of uniform as a condition of attendance at the school. Thus it is felt that there would rarely be an incident where a student was unable to wear the uniform as a result of emotional or behavioural difficulties, as stated in clause 6(4)(g). We believe the credibility of the uniform policy would be tarnished if students were aware that they have the opportunity to apply for exemption due to emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is felt that determining the validity of an application on these grounds would be very difficult and would possibly trigger student disapproval should some students be exempt.

The granting of an exemption on the grounds of emotional or behavioural difficulties negatively impacts on our attempts to create equality in the school with regards to uniform. Overall we support the clause in its aim to prevent discrimination and allow appropriate exemptions.

Mr SMITH — A uniform signifies which school students come from. It shows the community who we are, and it allows our participation in the community as well as our good deeds and behaviour to be recognised by the public.

All students should be seen as being equal by their uniform. The uniform should prevent any discrimination that may occur if the uniform is not worn. However, if students feel they cannot wear or are physically unable to wear a uniform, then they should have the option to be exempt. Students should also have the right to express their religion whilst wearing their uniform.

The uniform policy must apply to students, as outlined in clause 6(1). The school uniform should allow for equal or similar options to both boys and girls, and a range of sizes and designs should be available to suit a variety of individual shapes and sizes. If a student feels a design or size does not fit them comfortably due to their size, whether the uniform is too big or too small, then a similar uniform of the same colours should be allowed.

If a student finds it too distressing to wear a certain style of uniform, then they should be able to seek a custom-made uniform in their school colours and not be punished nor discriminated against because of it. The uniform should allow for equality between students, however, if students feel discomfort from the uniform, then they should have the option to discuss their needs with the school and come to an arrangement.

If the uniform does cause significant discomfort or significant emotional distress, then there should be the option to be exempt from wearing the school uniform. However, the student must then find a uniform which has similarities with the school's set uniform. If the uniform prevents students from participating in school activities, then there should be the option to wear a different but somewhat similar uniform. Whilst a uniform does show that we are equal as students, students should be able to compromise by wearing a similar uniform if they feel the uniform limits them in participating in everyday school life.

If a student cannot afford a uniform, they should not be exempt due to financial hardship. A school must assist in providing a uniform for those who cannot afford one. Exemptions, however, should be provided on the grounds listed under clause 6(4). Schools should be able to reject a request for an exemption which is not based on these grounds. The exemptions may be granted if the student does not feel comfortable in their uniform due to their body size or shape, if they are physically unable to wear the uniform due to health risks or concerns or if the uniform causes emotional or behaviour distress.

If a student is exempt from wearing a school uniform, they should be forced to wear a uniform that is similar to the one offered at that particular school. School uniforms should allow for students to express their religions. The

uniform policy must allow students exemptions for the wearing of religious items, such as turbans, hijabs or crucifixes. Religions should not be discriminated against — —

The CHAIR — The member's time has expired.

A number of amendments have been proposed in regard to this clause, and I invite students to move them.

Mr JACOB — I move:

7. That clause 6(2) be amended to read:

'The uniform policy must allow students exemptions for the wearing of items strictly required by their religion unless it presents a safety risk.'

I am not saying that they should not be able to express themselves and their religion, but when it presents a safety risk, it should not be allowed.

For example, in the Sikh religion there is something called the kirpan which is a type of ceremonial dagger required to be worn by Sikhs. This is dangerous because the person wielding it could, say if they were young and immature, use it in a bad way, or if someone else got hold of it, they could use it to harm others.

Also, I believe that kirpans should not be allowed in schools because when Sikhs go to the airport and get on an aeroplane, they have to take off their kirpans, and therefore I do not believe that it should be allowed in school.

Miss KOH — As one of the few students from a uniform-free school here today, I point out that I feel there is a misguided sense of what it is really like to go to a uniform-free school. It is not full of bullying, or people are not specifically judged on what they wear. I, personally, have had no problem throughout my experience at high school, and I am in year 11.

Pride has been mentioned a lot today, but what sort of pride is being referred to? Is it the pride of conforming or of blind obedience? I thought Australia was meant to be proud of its diversity in religion and I point out that this amendment does not specifically say that there are any other religions apart from these four religions. If people have other beliefs, for examples wearing pentagrams or things like that, could that be included?

The CHAIR — You managed to present a few things that did not seem to relate to the amendment at first, which was good, but you worked in the amendment towards the end; very clever going.

Miss PUMPA — I go to a school with uniforms, and I wanted to mention the little badges that some people wear; I have seen lots of them today. I would like to know how equality comes out of that. Some kids have seven badges, some have one, and others none — how is that related to equality? I think there are some better students and it separates the better students from the not-so-better students, and I do not see the point of that.

The CHAIR — I think that one did drift a little bit away from the amendment before us in relating to cultural and religious issues, but you got your point in.

We will now vote on amendment 7, that certain words be removed and that the bill be tightened up so that the only exemptions are for strict religious dress.

Amendment defeated.

Mr ROSEN — I move:

8. That clause 6(3) be amended, to read:

'Any religious items worn under clause 6(2) of this bill should be of an appropriate size and worn appropriately.'

If you are to wear a religious item, for example a burkha, it should contain the school colours.

As Frankston High has said, that is not great, because, for example, at Balwyn our uniform is green, which is a good colour so that would be okay, but for another school that may have, say blue and yellow, it might be harder to find one. You do not want them to stand out so it would probably be better not to have the school colours.

I would also like to add that any religious items worn should be of adequate size, for example, a necklace. Therefore a crucifix could not be a giant crucifix that goes half way towards your shoulders, or something like that. That should be an adequate size, that should be decided by the school.

Mr WILLIAMS — Personally, I think if it was in the school policy it would allow you to fit in even more because then you would be the only one who would not be standing out and looking around here. It seems that none of the school colours is really over the top anyway. It is not like it is going to be a bright yellow burkha because most of these colours would be all right for a burkha.

The CHAIR — The amendment is pretty straight forward in that it would remove that provision relating to having burkhas, or whatever, in the school colours.

Amendment agreed to.

Miss PEARCE — I move:

9. That clause 6(4) be amended:

omit the words 'emotional or behavioural difficulties.'

It is felt that determining the validity of an application on these grounds would be very difficult and would negatively impact on our attempt to create equality.

Miss HOTCHIN — Emotional and behavioural difficulties are often as uncontrollable as physical disabilities, health conditions and a person's body size. If a condition causes these students to be uncomfortable due to these difficulties, they should have the same right as other people with other conditions.

Miss CHAPPLE — We think that it should be staying still because emotional difficulties could be the same as body size. You could have emotional difficulties because of your body size and things like that.

The CHAIR — I understand there are a number of people wanting to speak, but I am aware of the time. I think I will put that amendment to the vote. I ask you to be clear on the amendment: it would take out that exemption opportunity for emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Amendment defeated.

Mr GREIG — I move:

10. Amend clause 6(7)(b):

add the words '(but not classes)' so that the subclause would read:

'The student will continue attending school (but not classes), either in or out of uniform, while the department considers its decision.'

Where a student and/or its parents, care-giver and their school cannot agree on whether an exemption should be granted, the student will continue attending school, but not classes.

The student's education and safety should not be compromised as previously addressed in clause 4(10). We propose that any student in disagreement over whether an exemption shall be granted should continue learning in an environment where they will not disrupt other students from learning. As this student is out of uniform, it will be punishing the remainder of the student body by disrupting their learning.

At Frankston High School we prevent such situations by caring. Students out of school uniform continue to stay at school but are removed from interfering in classes and are placed in a coordinator's office where they continue working until the time when such an agreement can be reached. A student's education and safety should not be compromised by their uniform.

Miss SHERIDAN — If the person were not to go to classes if they were out of uniform, it would still be interrupting their education because they would not be learning in their classes. They could do study at home or at school, but if they not in classes, they are not getting educated.

The CHAIR — I presume you are speaking against the amendment? It is a brief amendment; basically the amendment moved by Frankston High School means they could not attend classes if there is still an issue.

Amendment defeated.

The CHAIR — I think it is clear that that amendment is lost and that students should not be compulsorily withdrawn from class.

Are there any questions of students by committee members before that clause is voted on?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are there any students in your schools, if you have a school uniform policy, that use exemptions as an excuse not to wear a uniform; if there are, that you know of, what happens? How does the school deal with that student?

The CHAIR — Does anybody have an answer to that, where exemptions appear to have been abused?

Miss MILDENHALL — We do not exactly have a school uniform, but there are a couple of kids — a boy in my class, to be exact, who is a complete punk and he has his hair gelled up every day, and the teachers say to him, ‘Sam, you cannot keep doing this. You cannot keep wearing all these weird, whacky clothes with safety pins and cut jeans and all this weird tartan stuff’, but he still gets away with it anyway because he has an attention disorder, so I was wondering if that is a problem in some other schools?

The CHAIR — That is an interesting case.

Miss FORREST — Does that personally interfere with your learning because I can tell you that is his personal expression of his individualism and he has a right to do that?

The CHAIR — I do not know that we are really taking this as a debate across the floor at this stage. Any comments are to be addressed through the Chair and relate to the initial question.

Mr CENTENO — At Balwyn High we have uniform passes, so if you are out of school uniform, like wearing thongs or whatever, you need to have a uniform pass, and also if you are out of school uniform and you have three strikes, then the school is entitled to give you penalties for that, so I guess it depends on how often or if you really intend to not follow the rules intentionally. If you do not follow it three times and the school has given you a warning already, and still you did not follow it, the school should be entitled to give penalties for that.

The CHAIR — What is the punishment if you abuse the three strikes?

Mr CENTENO — You are given detention.

Mr TOMS — We do not get these problems because the students know what is expected of them and these exemptions really are not used as excuses. If they are, then they are punished accordingly in the coordinator’s office.

The CHAIR — That is a very clear answer.

I will put clause 6 to the vote. It concerns the equal opportunity issues associated with uniforms. In regard to that, only one of the amendments put — no. 8 — was successful, so the effect of that amendment 8 now stands part of the clause that is to be voted on, with subclause (30 having been withdrawn).

Amended clause agreed to.

The CHAIR — We have now completed the business that we intended to complete ahead of the luncheon adjournment, so I am about to suspend business. Thank you all for your contributions this morning. You have been very good. That is all I want to do say. Thank you very much. You have made some great contributions this morning. I am looking forward, as are other committee members, to talking with you a bit more informally over lunch. Enjoy your lunch. We will be resuming at 1.30 p.m.

Proceedings suspended.

Clause 7

Mr DODEMAIDE — Firstly, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to express our views about clause 7, which is headed ‘‘Uniforms to reflect appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements’. It is an important aspect of school uniform policy.

We believe that it is a critical component as it impacts on other provisions, such as ‘uniform policy to apply equally to all students’, which refers to discrimination. Wearing the same uniform means that we are seen as equals in the schoolyard. We at Bacchus Marsh College have our own retail supplier, and this allows for easy access to purchase uniforms and also keeps money within our local community. We would encourage other schools to do the same wherever possible. This brings up our next issue — that of Australian made products.

We believe that wherever possible the uniform should be Australian made to keep money and jobs within the country. However, if cost or availability is an issue, imported goods which are of high quality, made of durable materials and easy and economical to maintain should be considered so as to bring the cost down. This would also help the State Schools Relief Fund to work more effectively in their outstanding contribution to schools, as well as greatly helping to fulfil the provisions of clauses 7(1)(a) and (b), that:

- (a) most members of the school community can afford all items required by the uniform policy; and
- (b) the items required by the uniform policy are easy to obtain for the majority of the school community.

Finally, we believe that there should be various ways to give financial support to families who may be struggling to meet the costs of new, fully-priced uniforms. For example, schools could implement a second-hand uniform drive or any of the other suggestions listed in clause 7(4) such as uniform loan or exchange services and flexible payment options.

Mr HUDSON — Clause 7 of the bill stipulates that uniforms should reflect appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements. This applies of course only to schools choosing to adopt a uniform policy. The clause covers durability, fabric quality, availability and affordability, then proceeds to detail acceptable terms of sale. Whether such considerations require state legislation remains moot. However, the proposed legislation takes upon itself the responsibility for even the minutest aspects of uniform.

It is stated that schools are required to offer assistance in obtaining uniforms to families and students experiencing financial difficulty. The provision of assistance must be conducted in a manner that will not leave students stigmatised or embarrassed. School uniforms, for those schools who choose to adopt them, must be purchased from manufacturers who can demonstrate that their product is environmentally friendly, Australian made and both ethical and non-exploitative.

How this can be regulated whilst still remaining within the context of affordability and availability has not been addressed. Further definition should also be given to terms such as ‘Australian made’ — does this include all the aforementioned fabrics and materials?

Statistics provided by the State Schools Relief Committee, referred to in clause 7(4)(d) suggest that more than 7000 unfortunate students will have required financial assistance in affording a uniform in 2007. As a student from one of the very few non-uniformed state schools, I can state from personal experience that the sum of costs for items of clothing in compliance with our dress code is generally lower than that for students in uniformed schools.

The argument that a school without a uniform isolates children from underprivileged families is unsubstantiated. In reality the combined cost of uniforms plus casual clothes for weekends is often far greater than the cost of buying normal clothes. Also students are just as likely to be teased at a uniformed school for any small difference in their appearance, be it older shoes or a stained T-shirt. The pressure to wear expensive clothes is much more apparent in uniformed schools on free dress days, when students feel a heightened obligation to impress their peers with grand clothes.

Furthermore, our students are comfortable, confident and happy with the clothes they are in. Students at our school enjoy relative freedom in their dress, as our dress code is based on logical health and safety considerations. This code does not infringe on a student’s right to self-expression but does ensure a safe and practical working environment.

We are certain that the price of a uniform will not elicit pride from students who are unwilling to display it. An unaffordable uniform demonstrates that to find a sense of belonging in your school you must comply with a

superficial collective image. Can this compare with students creating an image for their school through their hard work and responsible actions? The length of a student's socks does not represent their academic, creative or athletic ability.

Integrity, respect and diligence are not qualities of materials or fabrics but rather are the merits of a hard-working individual. The costs of uniform go beyond the financial aspects, so many struggle to afford them. It comes at the price of individuality and the benefits of student responsibility.

Miss C. FORRESTER — The issue is whether or not to wear uniforms at school. In most schools it is the school council which decides whether or not a uniform is compulsory. If a uniform is compulsory for attendance at a particular school, then parents are obligated to buy it and students to wear it. The cost of wearing uniform is similar to the cost of free dress.

A jumper from schools in our area costs around \$90. After purchasing the other requirements of the school uniform, such as pants, shirt, dress, shoes and so on, parents are looking at a cost of around \$350. This may seem like a lot but the uniform can last for several years. With free dress initially you would not be spending this amount but over the course of a year you would spend a similar amount. Free dress would become a more expensive option for students if they decided to spend more money on brand names, such as Billabong or Roxy.

Uniforms are cost-effective as they are bought from a stipulated shop for high-quality clothes. You wear a uniform for five days a week so it will last longer, whereas with free dress you are wearing casual clothes seven days a week for a range of different activities, so they will wear out quicker.

Schools have a responsibility to help families with financial difficulties purchase uniforms for their children. Ways of doing this may include second-hand uniforms; payment plans, so families can make payments over a period of time; and vouchers, so that parents can use them to purchase parts of the uniform, such as school shoes.

Schools that do not have a school uniform have other rules, such as not wearing brand names, singlets or thongs. It would be just as easy to buy the uniform. Schools should not profit from the sale of uniforms. They should ensure that each and every student is given the chance to attend the school of their choice by keeping the cost of the uniforms at the lowest possible price.

In summary, free dress is more expensive, and schools have an obligation to financially support families in need. Plans to help these families must be discreet, and arrangements must be confirmed with the parents, students, and principal. Schools should not be able to profit from the sale of uniforms, as they are already expensive. Individual schools have the responsibility not only to educate students but also to make school inexpensive and accessible.

Mr HAMILTON — Firstly, with reference to clause 7(6)(b) of the School Uniform Bill 2007, which suggests that only Australian producers should be able to supply uniforms to schools, I ask: why worsen the already significant financial burden on families when the global market offers us a diverse range of cheaper alternatives? If we have access to items that are identical in both condition and quality to the excessively priced items made in Australia, but which are made abroad at a significantly reduced cost, what motive is behind implementing the impractical market restriction of sanctioning only locally produced uniforms for supply to government schools?

Of course it can be argued that this sanctioning is of great benefit to Australian companies. This is true. I take a second to state that we fully encourage supporting Australian industry, but local companies need the opportunity to become internationally competitive, and restrictions such as that listed in clause 7(6)(b) do not facilitate international competitiveness. While uniforms persist in being a compulsory accessory to students' education, we believe families are entitled to access cheaper alternatives from foreign suppliers. This market subsidy hardly conforms to our nation's goal of free trade.

All this limitation creates is a completely unnecessary and avoidable expense that should by no means hamper the financial stability of Australian families. What benefit is there in paying, for example, \$200 for a school blazer, when an identical blazer can be purchased for \$100 elsewhere? In response to these circumstances, we suggest that the restriction on school uniform suppliers in clause 7(6)(b) should be disregarded and omitted in the interests of families, who need not succumb to the unnecessary costs this sanction represents.

Another point we would like to bring to everyone's attention is the issue of whether schools should be able to yield profits from the sales of uniforms. We think if the prices are not going to be excessive, why not? When we look at

this from a broader perspective we see that the surcharge applied to school uniforms would be minimal — perhaps just \$2 per school uniform item.

This small addition to the price of uniforms could accumulate funds that have the potential to significantly benefit the school community. Perhaps the revenue could be utilised to finance the structural development of schools. Consider the notion that if we adopt foreign companies as the suppliers of school uniforms and implement a minor surcharge on the uniforms sold, we could be looking at families spending significantly less and facing less financial difficulty when it comes to their children's education, as well as students reaping the benefits that the minute surcharge on the price of school uniforms would offer.

In closing I add to that in exclusion of that subclause that I have mentioned, we are in full support of the other subclauses of the clause, inclusive of the provision mandating that financial assistance be made available to families facing financial difficulties.

Mr FISK — I move:

11. amend section 7.3 to read:

'Schools may use the sale of uniforms for fundraising, provided any profit made is used for the benefit of students and the school.'

Fundraising through the sale of uniforms must go straight back to assisting families who cannot afford them. If schools are not able to sell uniforms, a private company must be employed to provide them. When this occurs, the company will not be forced to financially assist families who cannot afford the uniform. Such companies are also able to charge whatever price they like. Selling uniforms would allow schools to regulate the price of uniforms and to make a small profit and use it to assist families who cannot afford uniforms. For the reason that it will benefit students, we believe that fundraising from profits from the sale of uniforms should be allowed, provided that prices are reasonable.

Mr BUTLER — We wish to support Werribee Secondary College's amendment. Despite the fact that our school, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, does not have a uniform, our student council sells merchandise in the form of drink bottles, caps and that sort of thing, including a number of uniform items such as hoodies, jumpers and shirts. These are incredibly popular — we sell hundreds every year — and they are a mainstay of our student council's budget. We use the money to run various events at lunchtimes, socials, trivia nights and to make donations. We believe that if we are stopped from selling these items, it will be a restriction on the activities of our student council, which will ultimately be of no benefit to our students.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr EXTON — I move:

12. amend clause 7(6)(b) to read:

'Australian made where possible.'

Having Australian-made uniforms benefits our businesses and economy. We feel that uniforms should be Australian made where possible. We have checked all of the items in our uniform, and they are all foreign made. We contend that uniforms should be Australian made where possible.

Mr HOWES — Werribee said it, too — the idea that uniforms should be made in Australia where possible. That is unacceptable. It has to be made in Australia because, with the countries you are talking about when you say it can be cheaply made, we can buy it more cheaply for a reason. That reason is that the clothing is made basically through slave labour.

I lived in Cambodia for three years. I can guarantee that the clothes you will get there will cost so much less, but the fact is that the people who make the clothes get paid 10 cents an hour and work in conditions that are more than 40 degrees. They do not get any breaks and are working a minimum of 18-hour days. If this state is willing to pass legislation that is going to support that, I do not want to be a part of it.

Mr NYAGUY — I believe Australia is selling itself short a lot at the moment with free trade agreements. The countries that we are setting up free trade agreements with are countries where workers have no minimum wage and no rights. Australia has very strong rights, and we have a minimum wage, which makes us very unequal

with countries that have no equality with their workers. I think if Australia is going to keep selling itself short, nothing is going to be made here. Industry is continually going overseas, and I think that is not positive for Australia in any way. I see no reason why any part of our uniform cannot be made in Australia. It benefits Australia that what we wear to school is made by us.

Mr HUDSON — I think you will notice the wording of the amendment says ‘where possible’, and that is a key point. If you look at the zip on your pants, for example, you will see that it probably says YKK. It is one of the only zip manufacturers in the world — there is about one other main competitor — and if you are saying you cannot use international products in uniforms, you are basically saying they cannot have zips.

There are other things like fabrics. You will find that it is very difficult to source economic and diverse ranges of fabrics locally created. Of course I agree it should be done wherever possible, and definitely we should support all Australian trade and work, but you need to accept that we need to make some licence, at least temporarily, until you can encourage industry to produce things locally.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Just before I ask you to vote on clause 7, as it has been amended, are there any questions from committee members?

The CHAIR — I want to follow up on the Australian-made issue. I was particularly interested in the view of Jack from University High, his having lived in Cambodia. There is an issue about our not supporting low incomes or people who are producing uniforms at very low cost, but the counterpoint is: if you do not buy the uniforms from them, does that mean that there is less work for people in those very poor countries? At least by buying items from those countries you are supporting people to have some work in those countries. I am interested in some feedback in regard to that counterpoint.

Mr HOWES — It is true that they actually do get work like that, but the reality is that that is the only work they can get in that country, so they are willing to accept these torturous conditions, because that is the only way they can support their family. Maybe if we did start sourcing from these countries we could maybe support the companies.

The states could help support them and give them more money, or demand that they set some sort of standard minimum wage so that these people are fairly paid for the work they are putting in. A lot of it is child labour and goes against the UN’s bill of rights. I think by supporting these exploitative conditions we are, in that flow-on effect, not exactly supporting the bill of rights, and I think that is a terrible thing.

Mr BRENTWOOD — Does this mean people who are not in a uniform school have to wear Australian-made items, like University High School? Is all your clothing Australian made?

Mr HOWES — Yes, all my stuff is made in Australia, because I do not believe in exploitation.

Mr HAMILTON — It is hard to generalise the socioeconomic conditions of all Australian families on a very narrow perspective of ethics. Not all families are able to afford Australian-made goods. They could be 500 per cent of what they are from foreign suppliers, so when people have to buy these uniforms I think it is appropriate that people should not have to resort to Australian suppliers. It should not be compulsory.

Miss MILDENHALL — Does that mean you are putting people’s lives in Cambodia more at risk than people’s lives in Australia, where the biggest problem that we face is our body turning against itself or interest rates rising, whereas in Cambodia they are facing death if they do not have these jobs?

But still we want to help them and not put ourselves at their mercy. We buy clothes from Australia, but we want to help them anyway. Maybe we should be thinking not about buying stuff from Australia but buying somewhere in between so we are helping the people in Cambodia and not entirely revolving around ourselves while not putting Australia’s economy at risk.

Mr WOOD — I am talking about Australian-made clothing. I can say that 90 per cent of you in here are probably wearing clothing from a foreign country. Probably about 5 per cent of you sitting here are probably wearing Australian-made clothes. You can barely ever find Australian-made items as it is, and when you can it

costs so much. As it is it costs so much more for normal families to afford foreign-made clothing than it does for Australian-made clothing.

Miss MULLAN — At the end of the day, people are poor in every single country around the world. Regardless of where you go, you have people on the streets, people who are working for under-award wages or whatever. At the end of the day one country cannot turn around and try and stop buying exported good because that would cut off a lot of the slave labour — as people like to say — funding, and they will have even less than they already have now. So it is not going to make that much of a difference.

The CHAIR — Do we think that school uniforms generally are good value for money? I am interested in some comments.

Mr DUBBELD — I believe generally school uniforms are worth what you pay for them. I believe in a lot of cases if you buy the uniform at the start of the year, generally it will last at least that year or a couple of years. I know that we play footy at school and many other sports during our lunchtimes and breaks, and most of the time we are in our school uniform. They survive all that. They get dirty, and you can wash them again. I believe they are value for money.

Mr HOWELLS — Some schools go to a sole manufacturer to buy their uniforms, so it is up to them to set the monopoly and whether the school gets profits from that. Other schools leave it open to get uniforms from a variety of places throughout the town or city. There is debate about whether a school should choose a sole manufacturer that chooses a set price, or whether people can shop around to get value for money.

Miss E. FORRESTER — Like Catriona said in her speech, we think that our clothes are good for value because they can last for several years. I know a few students in my year have worn their jumpers or their dresses for a few years, and they are still perfectly fine.

Miss FORTE — Just as what was said, some uniform items can last up to three years. I know my jumper — considering I have not grown much in the last four years! — has lasted me until now. I think they are quite durable.

Mr NYAGUY — The uniform should last three years regardless of the price. It should be the lowest price possible. The government should be subsidising companies if they are in Australia so we get prices down. When jumpers and stuff are reaching up towards \$90 it is just ridiculous. I can buy clothes from Target or Big W or any other company and get them cheaper, and they will still last that time.

Amended clause agreed to.

Clause 8

Miss FORTE — While uniform policies and dress codes are developed to ensure equality and eliminate bullying, schools should conduct surveys of their communities, including staff, students and parents, as to what they would like to wear when representing their schools.

For the students who are having to wear the uniform, the parents who buy it, and the staff who enforce it, a uniform needs to be comfortable and light as well as making a school well presented. Governments should not be involved in issuing a uniform policy throughout Victorian schools because they are unaware of an individual school's socioeconomic background.

However, in saying that it would be beneficial for the government to provide guidelines, such as health and safety guidelines, that the school uniform subcommittee must follow to guarantee that all reasonable safety measures are taken into account when developing a uniform policy and dress code — for example, making sure that suitable and safe footwear is worn on the grounds and that sporting attire is appropriate for the activities being undertaken. Furthermore when the school's community is developing uniform policies it should ensure that they are clear and concise on what is and what is not classified as the uniform.

When policies are too vague students are unable to wear what is correct uniform because they are unsure or unaware of what the uniform is. The uniform needs to be clearly communicated through newsletters and reviewed regularly to be certain that students know what the uniform is and to clear up any ambiguities on what students can or cannot wear.

If it is not clearly stated in the uniform policy or dress code, then students should not be expected to abide by the rules, but once the issue has been cleared up, the students have no excuse. If students and parents fail to comply with the uniform policy, they should not have allowances to be excused from wearing it, except on the grounds of health reasons and religion, because if one person is exempt from the uniform, what is the point in having a uniform policy in the first place? Once one person has allowances, the whole school will expect allowances too, and then there will be no point in having a uniform.

When reviewing the policy it is not necessary to change the uniform policy or dress code unless there is an obvious majority who believe that the uniform needs to be adjusted. The whole school community should be involved when reviewing the uniform policy and opinions should be canvassed to learn of any changes in the community's values towards the dress code.

Lowanna College began by integrating three local schools together. At this time the main purpose of the uniform policy was that it was affordable and easy to adapt to, especially coming from another school and another uniform. However, as the time has passed and Lowanna has moved away from that time, uniform policies and dress codes have needed redeveloping. As it is usually the students who actually want the change brought about, they should be the ones who notify the school council uniform subcommittee, to initiate a change, via a member of the school representative council. One of the many changes that was introduced was the winter skirts. The purpose of the skirt was for students to feel confident when out in public and to feel a certain pride in their school.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The member's time has expired.

Mr EDNEY — If you ask students anywhere, there are always concerns about the uniforms they wear: they do not like it, the colour is off, they look dated. However, we all know that the reality is that the uniform has a purpose. Whether we agree with it or not, the uniform provides us, the student population, with protection and the ability to be easily identified. Although we really do not care for these reasons, for us, the purpose of the uniform is that we do not need to think about what we are going to wear in the morning and whether we are proud or embarrassed with the uniform we wear.

If we are embarrassed or ashamed of our uniform, then why not change it? As a member of the student body, why not change the uniform to reflect the current trends. Why is it that we do not change colours and emblems. Is it that we are too lazy to do so or are there other reasons?

The short answer to this is that there are processes that need to be adhered to. We have three possible modes of consultation that are followed in order to change the uniform. The process for the students is that we firstly present our request to the SRC, then to the education policy committee and then it is presented to the school council. The education policy, referred to as EdPol, acts like a filter before the school council.

The college staff leaders and parents are involved. As members of the SRC, we have presented several alterations, to find that requests are rejected. Some examples are: changing the colour of our socks; changing to the inclusion of beanies, which was blocked; and students having piercings, which is currently under review.

It was not until we began our investigations for today's hearing that we began to understand the complexities of the purpose of the uniform, and the stringent processes required to change the uniform. This ranges from the cost of changing the uniform, to the school and to the parents, and to the binding contracts with the uniform manufacturers, not to mention the fact that many schools have been associated with particular colours and recognised for these colours.

The manufacturers are also part of the process and in many ways they have the greater part, because if they are unable to find the fabric, or the production of the new item is too pricey, then neither the parents nor the college itself will support the change. The manufacturer is only concerned with reducing its costs and making alterations difficult, not only for us but also for the college.

Our uniform is outlined in our enrolment package, and is in our school diary for all of us to refer to at any given time. Believe me, all our teachers refer to it repeatedly if we are out of uniform, some teachers more so than others. Even our principal will pick us up on uniforms as he walks around the yard. The key to changing any item of the uniform is to gain the support of the parents and whether or not the parents will buy it.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The member's time has expired.

Mr CENTENO — I begin by discussing student, teacher and parent voice and their connectedness to the school in relation to clause 8. I will then discuss who should decide what students wear to school, the consultation process and why parents or care givers should agree to abide by the uniform policy prior to enrolling their child into the school.

First of all, there are many facets of connectedness within any school setting. We know that when teachers feel connected to their colleagues for collaborative support, they are less likely to leave their profession. We also know that when parents feel connected to the school they are better able to support student learning for supportive home environments.

On the other hand we should not forget that schools are for students. For a school to be able to provide for the needs of its students, it should first of all know what its students need. In a world where we are encouraging global citizens to work together, we should start off within small communities, and that includes schools, being a community in itself.

That leads to the question of who should decide what students wear to school. The answer, in my opinion, is the school. This is because schools may share similar philosophies in learning, but then have different philosophies and values, religious beliefs et cetera, and therefore a school should be entitled to make rules for itself to follow its own philosophies.

Secondly, students should have the choice to influence the school's decision on the uniform policy. Nevertheless, they should not be given the power to make the decision for it would only generate students who wear whatever and whenever they want. For example, a student may decide to wear a bikini to school for the summer. That is an exaggeration, of course, but it shows how the role of the principal or the brain of the school is a vital piece for the orderly and proper maintenance of the consultation and decision-making process.

At Balwyn high we conduct surveys and have an important student-leadership process to best represent the students and be the link between students and principal and staff. We also have a parents association to have parent's input in the school's decision making. We also accept and embrace multicultural diversity and ensure that careful consideration is given to the views of teachers, parents, students and significant cultural groups in the school.

Finally in regard to parents or care-givers agreeing to abide by the uniform policy prior to enrolling their children into the school, I think that they should not be allowed to go to the school if they disagree with the philosophies and culture of the school. This is because parents or care-givers have a choice to decide which school their children should go to, and with that choice comes the responsibility of abiding by the school policy.

In summing up in relation to clause 8 of the School Uniform Bill, I strongly support the consideration that each member of the school community can offer and that for a school to continue its legacy it should be entitled to decline to accept students who disagree with the philosophies and culture of the school. Thank you, and enjoy the rest of the day.

Miss HARMAN — Today I have been given the chance to talk about clause 8. It covers how the new rules of the policy are to be communicated between the school and its community. We think this clause is good because it will stop any confusion. Clause 8(2) states that the school is required to review its policy every three years. We think this is good because it can give new generations into the school the opportunity for them to have input into the policy.

Clause 8(4) states that if people listed in subclause (3), which are the parents, teachers, students and cultural groups of the school community, cannot agree on a decision, it should be made by the education department. We had trouble deciding if we wanted to make any amendments to this section, but we think that the decision should be made by the majority of the groups before it goes straight to the education department.

Clause 8(5) states that any changes made to the policy should not come into force 'earlier than one year' and should be communicated in the school newsletter. We agree with the first part of this clause, but with the second part we believe there should also be a note sent home that requests a parent's signature so that the school can make sure that everyone knows about the new rules, and they can take further phone calls to make sure everybody knows. Thank you, and enjoy the rest of the day.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I invite Kyneton Secondary College to move its amendment.

Mr MACKINTOSH — I move:

13. Amend clause 8(4) to read:

'If the groups listed in clause 8(3) are unable to agree on all or part of a uniform policy, the decision will be made based on the majority of preferences. Where no majority is clear, the decision will be referred to the education department.'

The idea behind this is that the decision will only be sent to the education department as a very last resort.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Does anyone wish to speak on the amendment?

Mr FISK — Can I just have a clarification from you guys?

Mr KOTSIRAS — Through the Chair, please.

Mr FISK — From that school, please, about what 'majority of preferences' actually means or is?

Miss HARMAN — We mean that the groups take a vote and then the majority of the vote is the answer.

Mr ROSEN — What if it ends up being that there are two parties involved and they both want a different thing, and it equals the same thing, will it then be decided with another vote or, if it is deadlocked, will it be taken to the education board?

Mr MACKINTOSH — Basically our whole idea was to just leave that as the last possible resort. That is pretty much the last thing that we want because that is just long and tedious.

Mr NYAGUY — I would like to ask the Chair or Kyneton College what percentage of the vote would be made up of students, seeing as it is they who are wearing the uniform?

Mr BAKER — We intend to include the entire school community, so that includes students, teachers and parents — anybody who has an opinion on the matter.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I will now put the amendment to the vote.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Are there any questions from the committee?

The CHAIR — I was going to ask in regard to this one for some comments from students about examples of times when they have wanted to suggest changes in regard to the uniforms at their school, so I guess it mostly relates to schools with uniforms, although I suppose there could be examples in non-uniform schools where there have been suggested changes to the uniform policy and where perhaps it has been successful.

Miss FORTE — We have had several changes made. One of them was the winter skirt which I mentioned earlier, but another one we have tried to implement is the wearing of ballet flats because in our uniform policy it is not clearly stated whether we can wear them or not and, as many people are getting disciplined for wearing them, we thought why not make this uniform, but at the moment the feedback for the process for it being passed has not been given to us.

Miss SHERIDAN — When I was at the junior campus the pants were unisex and many of girls were wearing Face Off, which is fitted pants, and at the moment they have changed it so we can wear similar pants to the Face Off, so they have changed that — with the school logo on them.

Miss FITZGERALD — We are moving schools in 2009 and we have to go through the parents, the teachers and us for different colours of the uniform and if we are going to change anything, so we have different ideas for what we want changed.

Miss HARMAN — We have just recently changed the design of our jumpers, as most of these are different. I was in the student leadership group. People had said to us that they wanted it changed, so we spoke to the principal and other people. We had a survey and went around and talked to every class and asked if they would be interested in changing it. Because the result came back positive, we had to then take it to the school council, and then it became part of the uniform.

Mr DEEGAN — We are currently getting feedback from students, teachers and possibly parents about a sports uniform. It has gone through the student council, student leaders and teachers meetings.

Miss CASHIN — For several years many students have tried to get a school scarf as part of our uniform. The majority of students believe that this will make our uniform look more sophisticated and will encourage a sense of pride. This year it was taken to the school council, and we were given feedback that they will allow us to trial a school scarf as long as we can show that we are wearing our uniform correctly — wearing our ties up and our blazers. Hopefully we can do that and we will get a school scarf.

Miss E. FORRESTER — At our school a lot of our students are unhappy with our PE uniform, which is a red polo shirt and basketball shorts. We were unhappy with the colours of it, because red is not actually in our school uniform; it is normally navy blue and white. We have put it forward to the school council quite a few times, and it has been knocked back every time because the pants we wanted were able to be bought in other shops, and it wanted them to be bought from our school uniform shop.

Miss KOEHN — An issue for a change in uniform that has been of great importance to the students at our school has been whether girls are allowed to wear knee-high black socks with a winter skirt such as the one I am currently wearing.

Currently the situation is that students are only allowed to wear white socks; however, a vast majority of students—almost every student in the school community — as well as a lot of parents think that black socks are acceptable. We have had student petitions which have been sent to school council, but school council has often point-blank refused the change of uniform. Most teachers are extremely strict in the enforcing the rule of no black socks, even over black stockings when they cannot be noticed. This is of great annoyance to students at Kew.

The CHAIR — I was going to suggest that we might need to look at moving a government bill that would allow students at Shepparton to be able to wear a different coloured top, and perhaps likewise for Kew with regard to black socks. What do we think?

Mr KOTSIRAS — You are the government, Chair: do something!

The CHAIR — I have one other question; it is sort of a two-part question. I am interested to hear if there is anybody here from a school that has a uniform who, if they had a choice, would prefer to go to a school without a uniform, and why that is. The other part of the question is if there is somebody here at a school that does not have a uniform who, if they had the choice, would have gone to a school with a uniform?

Mr BUTLER — I believe we can offer a perspective on this, because at our years 7–10 schools we had uniforms which were strictly enforced. I think I can speak on behalf of the others in saying that if you had asked us in years 7 to 10, we would have said yes, school uniforms are good, they encourage school pride, and we are a bit unsure about this whole Bendigo senior school thing of not wearing them. At a school of older students, a lot of the issues about bullying and that sort of thing do not exist, so from our perspective it has been a positive experience, and we would now definitely say that schools do not need a uniform.

Miss FORTE — I like the idea of having a uniform just because it makes it so much simpler in the morning to get up and get ready. You can just chuck a uniform on. There are no worries about having to try and figure out what to wear every day. That is why I like to wear my uniform — because it is so simple.

Mr TREW — It honestly does not make a difference to me in the slightest; I would be happy to go to either. The uniform changes nothing other than the cosmetic appearance.

Miss MILDENHALL — Obviously nobody here who is wearing a school uniform would want to admit completely that they want to go to a school without a uniform, because then they would be doing a complete backflip. If any of the honest, confident people would like to step up and actually admit it, then I admire you, and I would bow to you.

Miss VENDRAMINI — I would just like to ask the Chair: for all these schools that have uniforms, students seem to be saying that they are content that they have one, but they are also trying to put to school councils items of clothing that seem to be just casual wear. If you have a uniform, why are they trying to change it to reflect casual clothes?

Mr NYAGUY — I am currently in year 10. At our 7-10 campus we wear uniform and at our senior campus, which is 11-12, we do not wear uniform. I think at the 7-10 campus it is appropriate to be wearing uniform. I think, though, if we are going to be wearing uniform, it needs to be practical. Today I am wearing a blazer but pretty much every other day of the year I will not be wearing a blazer. If you went to my school right now, you would not see one person wearing a blazer. It is more of a decorative thing than anything else.

I think that that is the thing with uniform — it can be decorative at the right times, but when you are doing sport and when you are learning in class, it needs to be practical. At the same time I think that having no uniform at the VCE campus encourages individuality and a lot of people come from all around the state to our senior campus simply because it has no uniform and that encourages individuality.

Miss C. FORRESTER — The majority of our girls at Shepparton High School would move to a school without a school uniform because they do not like what we wear; it is not fashionable enough for them. But all the other schools in our area also have uniforms so they cannot go anywhere else anyway.

Mr KOTSIRAS — There are more hands up. I think I will take the last three.

Mr MACKINTOSH — I would love to go to a school that did not have uniform. I would pay money for out-of-uniform days.

Miss PUMPA — I would not be able to go to a school with a dress code because I have not seen one uniform that I like with a nice colour coordination sort of thing.

Miss MULLAN — I can quite honestly say I love my uniform. Every single person before they enrol at the school knows whether it has a uniform or not and to be quite honest you do have a say. You cannot turn around and say, 'My parents made me go there'. Another point with regard to uniform and whether it is better or not — why is it that those schools that do have a uniform have a higher enrolment rate than those which do not?

Mr CLEARWATER — I would like to say: you will pry my uniform from my cold, dead body. I think that the uniform is a valuable asset, I think it builds pride in the school and it creates a sense of unity that allows us to aspire to achieve more than we would in those schools that do not have a uniform. As to the criticisms of those people who are saying you would not find anyone from a uniform school who would want to go to a non-uniform school, I wonder if that criticism in reverse would also apply to them — would anybody who goes to a non-uniform school have the honesty to admit that they secretly want to go to a uniform school?

Mr KOTSIRAS — I will put clause 8, as amended, to the vote.

Amended clause agreed to.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Now I ask students to vote on whether the bill should be passed.

Bells rung.

Students divided:

Ayes, 72

Mr Jarrod Appleby

Miss Shamira Armstrong

Mr Cameron Baker

Mr Daniel Bartlett

Miss Claire Beggs

Mr Brendan Brentwood

Miss Hannah Brown

Miss Bronwyn Buby

Mr Jaan Butler

Miss Shani Cashin

Mr Josh Centeno

Miss Naomi Chapple

Mr Patrick Clearwater

Miss Grace Cliffe

Mr Ryan Close

Miss Erika Codognotto

Mr Lochlin Deegan

Mr David Dodemaide

Mr Nathan Dubbeld

Mr John Edney

Miss Mollie Ellis

Mr Bradley Exton

Mr Joel Fisk

Miss Kaytlyn Fitzgerald

Miss Emma Forte

Miss Courtney Gardiner

Miss Victoria Gerard

Mr Adam Greig

Miss Nicola Hajncl

Mr Johnny Hamilton

Miss Nicole Harman

Mr Peter Harvey

Miss Ellana Hedger

Miss Chelsea Hogg

Miss Simone Hotchin

Mr Daniel Howells

Mr Nicholas Hudson

Mr Praveen Jacob

Miss Essie Jansen

Mr Jacob Keenan

Miss Emma Koehn

Mr Alex Liao

Miss Brooke Lloyd

Miss Johanna Longmuir

Mr Jack Mackintosh

Miss Charlotte Mardling

Miss Jessica McDonald

Miss Sinead Mildenhall

Miss Annelise Milne

Miss Lyndall Morris

Miss Ashleigh Mullan

Mr John van Noorden

Miss Megan Pearce

Miss Stephanie Pittard

Mr Jordan Rosen

Miss Jacqui Shemer

Miss Courtney Sheridan

Miss Georgia Simmons

Mr Stephen Smith

Miss Anna Sturmeay

Miss Kirby Taylor
Miss Stacey Thomas
Mr Stephen Toms
Mr Joshua Trew
Mr Darby Turnbull
Miss Larissa Vendramini

Miss Katie Watson
Miss Elise Whitney
Mr Dean Williams
Mr Harley Wood
Mr Jack Wright
Miss Melissa Young

Noes, 14

Miss Sonja Dewar
Miss Lizzie Forrest
Miss Catriona Forrester
Miss Eilidh Forrester
Miss Elly Gritzalis
Mr Jack Howes
Mr Conway Hyde

Miss Olivia Koh
Miss Caitlin Koller
Mr Andrew Lomax
Mr Robert Nyaguy
Miss Morgan Pumpa
Mr Marcus Reeves
Miss Joanna Veal

Bill, as amended, passed.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

School camps: government subsidy

Miss VEAL — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. We request that every student in a government secondary school receive a subsidy of \$500 to offset the cost of a significant school camp during their secondary years of schooling. This subsidy should only apply to students at government secondary schools. This would help redress the imbalance between private and government schools. It would also give financially disadvantaged students the opportunity to participate in education outside of the classroom. With this support more students would attend the camps which would help their social development with their peers. It would also enable schools to develop a meaningful camp program.

Although the camps can be expensive, an allowance of \$500 may enable the student to attend various camps. This gives them the opportunity to participate in culturally enriching excursions. Camps are not only educational but can also help the student become confident and develop social skills. These are qualities a person should obtain for their future.

Finally, this allowance would enable disadvantaged students to have the experiences and skills that others can afford. It would also benefit advantaged families as they can spend their money on family-orientated activities or items.

The action I seek is for the minister to support this proposal to ensure all students in government secondary schools have access to the educational advantage that camps bring.

Schools: smoking bans

Mr KEENAN — I raise a matter for the attention of the ministers for education, health and human services.

As I am sure you are aware, projects have been put in place throughout government schools to educate students on the potential risks of smoking. However, a small minority of students still continue to disregard these warnings and continue to smoke, especially on school premises such as in the toilets. The majority of the student body, as I am sure you will agree, believe that this is a serious issue.

Currently, if a student is found to be smoking or handling cigarettes within the school premises, the school is only authorised to take punitive disciplinary action which seems to have very little deterrent value to the incidence of smoking.

We seek to have a total ban on smoking on all school premises made an enforceable by-law. Thus if a student is found to be smoking or handling cigarettes on school premises they are liable for fines or even prosecution, as is the case with all other citizens. Cigarettes have been banned from public venues such as pubs, clubs and sporting venues for health reasons, and any non-compliance is punishable by law

Why then should students found smoking or handling cigarettes on school grounds be shown any legal leniency? We feel the fear of prosecution would ultimately halt the level of cigarette smoking in schools, therefore decreasing the incidence of smoking caused by peer pressure. Most of all we believe — —

Mr KOTSIRAS — The member's time has expired. Normally during the adjournment debate you ask action from a single minister. You cannot raise an adjournment matter for two ministers; it must be for one minister.

Apollo Bay P-12 College: reconstruction

Mr TREW — I raise a matter for the Minister for Education. I wish to address the issue of fundraising for maintenance for our school and other regional schools. Our school was approved for a complete reconstruction over 10 years ago. So far only one-third of the reconstruction has taken place, and getting funding at the moment looks somewhat unlikely.

Our school has many leaky roofs. We also use portables for our library, one of our main computer rooms as well as several of our classrooms. The heating systems in our school are insufficient. Half of them produce heat but do not blow it anywhere so it sits there and becomes a fire danger.

This is also said of many other rural schools in our region. The action I seek is for the minister to investigate the matter and, if possible, approve funding for Apollo Bay and many other schools in similar situations.

Mr KOTSIRAS — Thank you very much. I see myself writing a press release soon!

Bendigo: education plan

Mr BUTLER — I, Jaan Butler of Bendigo Senior Secondary College, wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. I wish to talk about the ridiculous changes that are taking place in Bendigo as part of what is known as the Bendigo

education plan. At Bendigo's five junior secondary colleges years 7 and 8 no longer have individual teachers for each subject. Just like in primary school, they spend their entire time, apart from two subjects, in one room. They have the same teacher for English, SOSE, science and maths. They do not even subject-specific assignments but do assignments which cover a broad range of areas.

So I ask: how does treating high school students like they are still in primary school achieve anything? These students will not have the experience of having teachers they like and teachers they hate but still have to get on with them. Rather than having a variety of teachers who are passionate about their subject and inspire them to go on, they are going to have the same teacher all day.

When you are in that primary school environment with the new report cards, which I am sure we will agree are as clear as mud — marked by VELS, which is absolutely incomprehensible, by teachers who are not qualified in that subject — how do you know where you are going when you reach VCE and all of that sort of stuff comes into play?

We ask the minister: why is a generation of Bendigo students being used as guinea pigs for a flawed experiment, which we are worried could spread around the state?

Mr KOTSIRAS — If there are any journos in the Parliament, could they please come to the chamber!

Bacchus Marsh College: road safety

Mr BARTLETT — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports. We at Bacchus Marsh College have a major issue with the traffic safety of our schools. On one of our main roads bordering the gates we have no speed restrictions or even a designated crossing, and it is an issue we have been pushing for well over five years. Why do we have to wait?

We ask why other schools have speed restrictions and crossings while we do not. We do not want to be ignored. One of our bordering roads is a black spot where there have been a number of fatalities. Students have died due to having no speed restrictions or crossings. We urgently need this issue to be addressed to authorities before more accidents happen.

Alcohol: under-age drinking

Miss McDONALD — I, Josephine McDonald from Yea High School, raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health regarding under-age drinking and binge drinking. I have first-hand knowledge that a large percentage of the alcoholic drinks consumed at parties these days are pre-mixers, with a combination of both alcohol and soft drinks, such as Vodka Cruisers, UDLs and Pulse.

It is the bright colours and catchy labels that attract the attention of our teenagers. Soft drink flavours such as passionfruit, raspberry, lemon and lime make these drinks easy to consume; however, many people do not understand just how much alcohol these drinks contain. When you think about how fast a 13-year-old or 14-year-old can drink a can of soft drink, you wonder how fast they could drink a Vodka Cruiser, keeping in mind that the cruisers have 5 per cent alcohol in them. Yes, 5 per cent might not sound like much, but if they are drinking six or seven of these drinks, what is that doing to their state of mind, not to mention their internal health?

The action I seek is for the minister to investigate the role that alcohol industry groups play in the marketing of such easily-accessed alcohol products.

Schools: maintenance

Mr DUBBELD — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. As students we have the right to feel safe wherever we are, including in necessities like toilets. How can students in Victorian schools feel safe using toilets with broken doors, disgusting environments and outdated facilities that also do not comply with the energy-efficiency regulations required to erect a rainwater tank. Having a safe and comfortable environment is necessary for good student wellbeing and outcomes. Students are taught to value our education, and that is reinforced through the VELS program, but how can we do this when our learning environment is not valued by those who enforce these messages?

Our school has been quoted a \$500 000 cost to bring the junior toilet blocks up to scratch. This is money we cannot get through funding. Why is that? Because the Building Futures program is focused on upgrading schools with portables. These portables are up to date and working, and smaller projects like toilets and other necessities are overlooked. We have been told by people in power from whom we have sought help that because we keep our toilets clean and maintain them to the best of our abilities we are bumped down on a list. This is not acceptable, so I ask: please put our necessities first.

Schools: computer access

Miss BUBY — As most would know, completing the Victorian certificate of education is a tough couple of years and requires a lot of dedication and hard work. At Ballarat Secondary College, year 12 students are allocated 8 to 10 study periods per week in which we are expected to use our initiative to enhance personal learning and to strive for academic excellence. The campus provides numerous facilities to enable this to occur. These include the canteen area, student lounge, the resource centre and the computer area. All these facilities are public and available for class bookings.

However, students wishing to utilise these facilities for their study periods always take second priority to the class groups, meaning that they cannot effectively learn and the time that should be spent researching and studying is now spent discussing what happened on the weekend.

We would like more computers in our school to enable us to research during our study periods — that is, computers that are just for study periods and cannot be booked for classes.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I am sure the Chair is taking note.

Schools: maintenance

Miss LONGMUIR — Our school is literally falling apart at the seams. Kyneton Secondary College is at the top of the list of schools needing money to be fixed up. Our rooms are falling apart, the paint is flaking, tables are missing legs and the tops come off. It is shocking. Fans fall out of the ceilings. It is pretty bad. We have leaking roofs. It is terrible. I swear that in our toilets you could find 10 new diseases that have never been noticed before.

There are nails sticking out of the walls, it is terrible and we cannot fundraise very well because we live in a poorer community. There are 48 per cent of the students that go to our school who are already getting financial support from the government. Our school does not have the means to get money so that we can get it fixed up. It is really shocking — you just do not want to go there — we need money.

Schools: recycling programs

Ms CHAPPLE — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Industry and Trade. We believe that rubbish in our school and schools in the Geelong region, is becoming an increasing problem and we feel that something should be done about it. Every day many students drop their rubbish without care as they are too lazy to find the nearest bin.

Whilst I acknowledge that the students must take some personal responsibility for their actions, I also believe that industry should take on a more active role in educating students about recycling the packaging that it uses on its own products. As studies show that nearly half the rubbish produced is packaged foods, we feel that the government could do some research into making environmentally friendly packaging.

We propose that the government encourages industry to fund schools in our region to promote the recycling of packages from foods we eat and to supply all students with lunch boxes and drink bottles. By doing this, we are reducing the amount of material flying around our schools and the amount of plastic bottles that lie on the ground and in the gutters, and that will one day end up in the ocean.

The action I seek is for the minister to investigate the possibility of involving the packaging industry in the solution to our schools' rubbish crisis.

Schools: bullying

Mr FISK — I speak on the issue of bullying in schools and how important it is for schools to have effective, mandatory, anti-bullying policies as well as resolution procedures, which assist both the victim of the bullying and the perpetrator.

Bullying can be physical, verbal, emotional or social and according to the Kids Help Line, one in six students is bullied every week. At present, if not all, at least most schools across Australia have anti-bullying policies, yet most of the time they are not seen to be effective.

I have been to six schools across three states in my school life and I have seen many interpretations of what defines bullying, what is acceptable and not acceptable behaviour, and how it is dealt with in the school setting. From my experience and that of fellow students — who also have never seen this happen at my school, Werribee Secondary College, but I have at other schools I have attended — particularly for those who are younger, I found that in many cases those in authority just believe that bullying is part of growing up; a sort of rite of passage.

While some schools do not stand for any form of bullying, others within a school believe that kids will be kids and tell them to sort it out themselves. Children who are in primary school and those who are in early secondary school generally do not have the life skills to sort it out themselves.

The effects of bullying are well documented. There is an indisputable link between bullying and childhood and adolescent anxiety, low self-esteem, loss of confidence, depression and self-harm.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The member's time has expired.

Public transport: fares

Ms KOH — We, the students at University High School, bring to the attention of the Minister for Transport initiatives that are extremely relevant to us. We believe that our public transport system should be free. At the moment only 6 per cent of travel is by public transport, but according to experts that could rise 20 per cent to 30 per cent by making it free.

This would lead to less road congestion which costs \$4 billion annually in Australia. Fewer cars on our roads would also mean lower greenhouse gas emissions and fewer traffic accidents. Last year 346 people died on our state's roads and 2400 people die annually from illnesses linked to air pollution.

It would cost the government \$400 million a year in lost revenue to make our public transport free. Getting rid of ticket machines would save \$60 million annually. Another way to raise the lost money would be that Melbourne could follow in London's footsteps by making a congestion tax on cars entering the CBD.

The federal government are also not spending enough on public transport. The \$16 billion surplus could easily fund it. Making public transport free could save hundreds of thousands of families and pensioners thousands of dollars a year that they would then have to spend on education, medicine and health, and leisure activities. In this way free public transport would contribute to a more level, social playing field as well as reducing greenhouse gases and creating a healthier, greener future for everyone.

Schools: report cards

Mr NYAGUY — I have several issues which I address to the Minister for Education. The first issue is VELs. So far I have not met one student who is happy with VELs. I find it ridiculous the way they are grouping students into groups. I think it is ridiculous that we will all get Cs. I talk to people who used to be getting As who now get Bs. I talk to people who used to fail subjects who now get Ds. I think it is not rewarding achievement, and not punishing people who do not achieve by having a system where the average mark is a C. I feel personally unmotivated if I know that it is good to get a C.

I also believe another problem with VELs is the comments. People are talking about students having to comment on our reports. I found most people just said they did not like their report, and then teachers said, 'Yes, we will follow it up', and never did. I think it is ridiculous that they have these comments. I think comments are important, but they need to be followed up and they need to listen to what we are saying.

Sandringham College: maintenance

Mr NYAGUY — Another issue is the funding for our school. It is falling apart. I find most public schools are falling apart. I am not sure that is. And yet still we continue to fund private schools. It is funny how you see some public schools that look fantastic and some schools that look pretty crap. Our school is falling apart. It was built in the 1950s. They said it was a temporary school; it was designed simply because of a population boom, yet it is still here today. Things in our school that are — —

The CHAIR — Mr Nyaguy's time has expired.

Public transport: service improvements

Mr HYDE — I am from Collingwood P-12 College. I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. I think the state of the transportation system at the moment affects the way my fellow peers and I get to school. Trains are too often cancelled and delayed, and overcrowded. The transportation system should also be free for all primary, secondary and university students. Sydney already has this system. In my opinion, that is the very least the government could do. Transportation should be free for all, and we should stop wasting money on new road tunnels. The way we can fix congestion is by having a much better public transport system. Trains buses and trams urgently need to be unprivatised. We also need more tram links, more bus lines and more train lines. It is getting harder and harder to get to school on time.

Kew High School: Celebrate Diversity program

Miss KOEHN — I am from Kew High School. I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. I request that the minister consider funding a statewide program in secondary schools to highlight the importance of diversity in the community. This program would allow for students to discuss issues relating to the importance of diversity, both within their school environment and the wider community.

Kew High School has implemented one such program, known as 'Celebrate diversity at Kew', which is comprised of students, teachers and youth workers from our local council. They are concerned with maintaining the importance of racial, cultural, sexual and religious diversity, and through this program students study the importance of differences within our society. They also study the problems that minority groups face and raise awareness of these. We believe similar programs could be introduced to other schools. The action I therefore seek is for the minister to investigate the implementation of such programs.

Footscray City College: toilets

Miss STURMEY — I want to ask the Minister for Education to take action to change the toilets at Footscray City College. The toilets at school do not work, the toilet rolls do not dispense, only 2 out of 5 have locks, and about 3 out of 5 flush. This is one of the two sets of toilets in the entire school. We wait for 15 minutes out of the 20 minutes that we get for recess just to get to use one of the toilets. We need more and better toilets. Please do something, Minister!

Animals: cruelty

Miss HOGG — Today I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Agriculture concerning lenient sentences imposed for cruelty to animals. Recent punishments do not reflect the current values of society and do not act as a deterrent. In a recent case of bestiality, an offender was given a community-based order despite pleading guilty to 18 counts of animal cruelty. It is a disgrace to our legal system that a Victorian offender can be given such a soft sentence when there was no remorse shown.

There has been an outcry over sentences of late for cruelty to animals, generally consisting of fines or suspended sentences. In a recent case a family was fined just \$700 for cruelty to two horses who were neglected and inappropriately treated. However, they are still allowed to own animals. Appropriate jail terms need to be imposed to serve as punishment to these criminals. It is absurd that a human can exploit defenceless creatures. I feel physically ill at the thought that innocent animals are the victims of such torture and the offender is able to walk free. They should have to suffer for the pain they have caused.

I call on the Victorian government to act as it is not appropriate that offenders who commit crimes against animals receive such lenient sentences. Today it may just be an animal, but in the future it could be a human.

Schools: dress code

Miss ARMSTRONG — I direct this question to the Minister for Education. As students from Eltham High School — one of a small handful of non-uniform state schools — our experiences and circumstances are highly relevant to the bill debated earlier today.

Our school has been without a uniform since the mid-1960s. Our students dress in compliance with a dress code based on logical health and safety considerations, not infringing upon a student's right to self-expression, but

ensuring a safe and practical work environment. The school is not opposed to uniforms as a whole. Indeed uniforms serve a distinct purpose in areas such as sport and public performances by the music department. The school enjoys a strong notion of individualism that our relative freedom of dress endorses.

Trusting our students' judgement, good self-presentation habits are encouraged. This is conducive to good habits for entering the workforce and higher education. Furthermore, our school enjoys a great sense of community — the lack of uniform greatly contributing to a positive rapport between staff and students. There is a sense of cooperation and equality rather than a dichotomous system of the teacher and the taught.

We assert that our school's policy on uniform is an intrinsic part of our ethos and values. By going to a school where we are able to express ourselves freely, we have been able to mature in a way that is not available to students from other schools. Our experiences have only been positive. Dress code policy should be left to the school's discretion and does not need legislation. Eltham High has been without a uniform for nearly 50 years, and there is no reason to make amendments to a working system.

Buses: services

Miss CLIFFE — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. We request that a greater number of buses run frequently on a wider range of routes within our school zone. This should enhance the security of and the convenience for students travelling to and from school.

Balwyn High School currently has one operating school bus. However, one bus is not adequate for our school population of almost 2000 people. Many students use public transport on a regular basis. Their safety could be improved by minimising the length of time they spend on public transport. A school bus designated solely for the use of students would ensure that they can travel on a direct path from home to school. More children using the school buses could dramatically reduce traffic congestion in streets close to the school, diminishing the chance of traffic and pedestrian accidents.

Regular public transport is often overcrowded with the general public or students from other schools. Large numbers of students using public buses could make the journey uncomfortable for all users, especially when carrying bulky school bags. The convenience of a school bus may potentially encourage higher rates of attendance by students who live a greater distance from school as they would find the journey simpler and more appealing.

Although Balwyn High has a strict zone policy, there are still students who attend the school on scholarships, such as our accelerated learning program, and therefore do live outside the normal school zone. The action I seek is for the Minister for

Public Transport to increase the numbers of buses operating in our school zone for school students.

Public transport: contracts

Mr WILLIAMS — I would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused by talking about public transport again. With the contract for Melbourne public transport coming again soon, will the state government finally do something about this vital issue? Will the government stop hiding behind the operator's excuse for late and cancelled trains? It is not guilty. Connex is hamstrung. Connex cannot spend money on trains or infrastructure; only the state government can.

Yet the government also has the cheek to fine Connex for running late trains. A perfect example of this was at the start of this year. I was keen to start at Melbourne High, and I eagerly walked down to my station. However, due to the Siemens rail crisis, I could not get on to three trains in a row because they were so crowded. I ended up getting to school half an hour late — not really a great way to start at my new school! Connex was blamed, but it merely inherited the Siemens stock from the old state-government-run rail network.

Instead of wasting millions on a white elephant of a new ticketing system, the government could buy more trains to bring Melbourne's public transport to the same world class as the rest of our wonderful city.

Public transport: operator accountability

Miss BROWN — I also raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport. Like the majority of girls from Melbourne Girls College I am a daily user of public transport, and over my five years of commuting from Altona to Richmond and back each day I have had a lot of time on Melbourne's trams, trains and buses to notice their faults. It seems that the organisations running our public transport are not after the same things as the commuters.

Take, for example, something that happened this week. After arriving at Flinders Street on a packed train, which was at least 5 minutes late, everyone was given a free copy of Connex's new, supposedly comical, book *There's No 'I' in Carriage*. While Connex may feel its commuters need this book to be reminded not to pass wind or apply make-up on its trains, I know that I and many others on my train would have preferred the money to be spent on another train or perhaps a new Connex employee to ensure the trains are kept on time.

I understand these businesses are run by private organisations, but really it is public transport and it is up to the government to ensure that it is being run in a way which is best for all members of the public. Is there a consumer watchdog who is watching Connex and making sure that the money commuters pay is being used in the best possible way because it does not feel like it. It is time the government took a stance and ensures that Melbourne's public transport is for the public.

Mr KOTSIRAS — The time allowed for adjournment matters has expired.

I was wondering whether this forum could be held again, with more members speaking. I am sure the relevant ministers will take note of what each one of you has said; and if the ministers do not, I am sure the shadow ministers will. The hearing is now closed and the meeting of the committee is adjourned.

I thank you, the students, for participating today. I thank the staff and the parents. This has been very successful, and it is because of you. I hope you had a wonderful time. I hope you gained something. We look forward to the next time that we have another hearing in the Parliament.

Committee adjourned.