

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools

Melbourne — 6 September 2007

Legislative Council chamber

Members

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Witnesses

Victorian primary school students (refer pages 2)

Belvedere Park Primary School

Mr Shane Colley, Year 6

Miss Amber Harry, Year 6

Mr Ivanko Rakoci, Year 6

Miss Christine Semertzidis, Year 6

Miss Skye Shayne, Year 6

Benalla Primary School

Mr Nic Facey, Year 6

Miss Lydia Hanrahan, Year 6

Miss Holly Lessing, Year 6

Miss Sarah McNamara, Year 6

Mr Sam Schneider, Year 6

Essendon Primary School

Miss Georgia Boyle, Year 6

Mr Nicholas Carlei, Year 6

Mr Riley Gilbert, Year 6

Miss Catherine Lee, Year 6

Miss Hayley Roach, Year 6

Laburnum Primary School

Miss Kate Cohn, Year 6

Mr Ben Fernando, Year 6

Mr Max Karklins, Year 6

Miss Stephanie Ruth, Year 6

Spensley Street Primary School

Mr Callum Croker, Year 6

Mr Harry Heard, Year 6

Mr Marcus Hocking, Year 6

Miss Nicola Nelson, Year 6

Miss Anna Richardson, Year 6

St Kilda Park Primary School

Miss Perrin Boseley, Year 6

Mr Hugh Kroker, Year 6

Miss Ruby Rees-Wemyss, Year 6

Miss Zara Sengstock, Year 6

Mr Gabe Steger, Year 6

Surfside Primary School

Mr Harley Burgess, Year 5

Mr Lochie Cooke, Year 5

Miss Indira Narain, Year 5

Miss Danielle Neal, Year 5

Traralgon (Stockdale Road) Primary School

Mr Lachlan Aitken, Year 5

Miss Amanda Beattie, Year 6

Miss Rebecca O'Connor, Year 6

Miss Abbey Shaw, Year 6

Miss Sarah Van Dorsen, Year 6

Mr HALL — Welcome to the Legislative Council. You have had lots of welcomes this morning. I am Peter Hall, a member for Eastern Victoria Region. Mr Nazih Elasmr is a member for Northern Metropolitan Region. We welcome you to this place here today for your debate on the School Uniform Bill. This is our classroom. We are both members of Parliament and, like you, go to a classroom every day. We also go to a classroom when Parliament is sitting and you are sitting in our classroom today. We have special seats, as has been told to you, and we must sit in our seat if we wish to speak to anybody in the Parliament. Mr Elasmr sits in that corner up there near the young lady in front of the microphone and I sit in the corner where the lady in the pink top is — that is my seat; you are sitting in my seat today. We have our special seats in which we have got to sit. Our school day usually starts at 9.30 a.m. and goes through until about 10 or 11 o'clock at night. We are not going to keep you that long today. We will try and finish a bit earlier and at a more reasonable time, but that is our classroom time.

What we want to do to start today's proceedings. We have to be a little bit formal in the way we do it because, as it has been explained to you, this is a formal hearing of the parliamentary Education and Training Committee. What you say today is going to be recorded by the people from Hansard, who are sitting down at the table on my left. You will be able to, probably by tomorrow, read what you have said in Parliament and make sure they have taken down exactly what you have said. In order to do that I need to read a statement here to make an official declaration that this is an official hearing of the parliamentary committee. 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 the 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 to you all and let the hearing begin.

Before you start saying a few words, Mr Elasmr and I will make an opening statement just to set the scene. What happens in a parliamentary debate is usually we have people who are speaking for the motion and those who are speaking against the motion and the Chair will alternate people from both sides speaking for and against. What we are going to do to start the proceedings is Mr Elasmr is going to present an opening argument for the piece of legislation we have before us and then I will speak against the legislation. Then we will turn it over to you. You have been nominated to speak on little, separate parts of the legislation we have before us today. That is how we will proceed. I call on Mr Elasmr to make an opening statement in favour of the bill.

Mr ELASMAR — I rise to speak to the School Uniform Bill 2007. The topic of school uniforms is one that many school communities feel very strongly about. The committee has heard many different views from hundreds of schools, teachers and parents over the past six months. Today it is the turn of Victorian students to contribute their thoughts to the parliamentary inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools.

The committee thought it would be novel and interesting to structure today's conversation around a mock bill. We wish to emphasise at the outset to all present today that the drafting of this bill by no means suggests that legislation will or will not be an outcome of the committee's inquiry. The committee is still just collecting different ideas and opinions and will commence its formal deliberations in coming weeks. For the benefit of participants and observers, I will briefly outline the key clauses in the bill and the arguments supporting those clauses. My colleague will then outline the opposing arguments.

Based on the evidence collected so far in this inquiry, a bill such as this would make important improvements to the way Victorian students look and feel during the time they spend at school. The key measure proposed in this bill is the introduction of compulsory school uniforms in all Victorian government schools. Some other Australian states and territories have already made or are considering making school uniforms compulsory. 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. In particular, they have described the pride in the school that their uniform generates. Students have told us that they feel proud to put on their uniform, because it reminds them that they belong to a unique learning community. Teachers and staff feel proud to work with students in uniform, because it creates a professional atmosphere focused on learning. They have also described the benefits for the school's reputation in the community if students are wearing their uniforms proudly outside the school grounds. If it is passed, this bill could make Victoria's public schools leaders in student dress and appearance, to match their outstanding academic reputation.

Clause 3 of the bill specifies that uniforms must be traditional and attractive in their design. This would ensure that uniforms can withstand changing fashions and continue to look good throughout students' school lives. Clause 3

also makes provisions to ensure that a smart, traditional uniform would not be ruined by an outrageous hair colour, heavy make-up, or untidy facial hair. It also requires teachers to set an example for their students by wearing neat, safe and appropriate clothing.

Many schools have told us that uniform policies are only successful if they are enforced. For this reason clause 4 of the bill asks schools to take appropriate disciplinary action to ensure that students follow the uniform policy correctly and responsibly. However, parents and students have expressed the view that discipline relating to uniform should never compromise the main purpose of schooling — education. The bill ensures that students who break uniform rules would not miss out on learning, by prohibiting punishments such as suspension, expulsion and withdrawal from class.

Teachers must also consider the impact that enforcing the uniform policy will have on their relationships with their students. It is not the intention of the bill that teachers' conversations with students would become dominated by arguments about the length of their socks or the colour of their hair. 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 extremely important, and the role of uniforms in protecting students has been raised frequently in this inquiry. Uniforms help keep students secure by making it easy to identify intruders on school grounds. They also help parents and teachers ensure that students are dressed safely for school activities, especially when it comes to sun protection in the summer terms. Despite what we know about skin cancer, many students, especially secondary students, still do not wear hats, sunglasses and SunSmart clothing outside. Clause 5 of this bill protects both students and teachers by forcing them to dress safely in the summer sun.

Many participants in this inquiry have suggested that a uniform makes all students equal. In government schools students come from all kinds of social backgrounds into a learning environment in which they have a right to feel welcome and secure. Unfashionable or unusual clothing can make students targets for bullying or teasing, and going to school can become a competition about who is the best dressed. Wearing a uniform can help students appreciate each other for who they are, not how they are dressed. On the other hand many people express important aspects of their identity through their clothing. For this reason clause 6 allows exemptions to uniform policies in special circumstances, including clothing required by a student's religion or special needs of different body shapes or health conditions. Schools should talk to these students and their families about what will make them feel most comfortable, and call on the education department if any disagreements arise.

Many people have suggested that uniforms also benefit families by reducing how much it costs to send a child to school. Typically today's students are very conscious of brands and fashions, and keeping up with new trends can be expensive. Clause 7 of the bill ensures that schools choose uniforms which are durable, easy to care for, and affordable for most families. It also suggests that schools support any families in financial difficulty. No student or family should be made to stand out or feel they do not belong, just because they have trouble meeting the cost of a school uniform.

Clause 7 of the bill reflects suggestions to the committee that schools should buy uniforms from companies who demonstrate Australian-made, ethical and environmentally friendly manufacturing. If schools set these standards, students may be more likely to learn how to become ethical and informed consumers in the future. As I have explained, many people believe that uniforms have benefits to offer all Victorian schools. However, the specific nature of each school uniform should be decided by the school community. Students, teachers, parents and community groups will all be affected by the policy in some way, so they must all be given the chance to have a say whenever a uniform policy is developed or reviewed. 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, I recognise that many people believe that a bill such as the one before you today would improve the appearance, morale and wellbeing of Victorian students, and the ability of government schools to develop and enforce effective uniform policies. I commend the bill to the house for its consideration.

I would like to ask my colleague Mr Peter Hall to speak against the policy.

Mr HALL — This morning I rise to speak against the School Uniform Bill and I would encourage all of you to think hard about the arguments in opposition to this piece of legislation that we have before us today.

Mr Elasmr finished up by saying that a school uniform policy will improve student appearance, morale and wellbeing. That may well sound an admirable intention, and indeed I support that intention, but I also make the point that making school uniforms compulsory does not guarantee the improvement in student appearance nor the wellbeing and morale that exists in students at particular schools. You only need look around the chamber today to see that at least two schools that we have here today, Spensley Street and St Kilda Park primary schools, do not appear to have a school dress code, particularly for today. But does that make them any less proud of their school? I am sure that those of you from Spensley Street are just as proud of your school as those from Stockdale Road primary in Traralgon and those from all the other schools that we have across the state.

I argue to you today, Mr Elasmr, and members in this chamber, that having a school uniform or not having a school uniform should not reflect on whether you have pride in your school or not. The pride in your school comes from the people from within it, the values you assign to going to your school and the belief that your school is the best school around the state. In terms of that particular contention that a school uniform will improve student appearance, morale and wellbeing, I do not think that argument stands up very well. After all, what if we were to convey the opinion to young people today that your appearance is the most important thing, that you must look good to feel good and be a good person. How would we be if we reflected that view to everybody in our society? That would mean we would all be prima donnas, that we would be all be mollycoddled, that we would all have to look our best all the time if we were going to have some pride in ourselves. But looking good and body shape and school uniform and the clothes you wear does not reflect upon you as an individual. It is who you are and what you are. So I say with respect to all those matters about wellbeing, having pride in yourself and building self-esteem that you do not have to have compulsory school uniforms.

I also want to go to the point about school uniform choice and who should make that decision. Should it be the government that imposes a decision upon you to wear a school uniform? Should it be your school, or should it be your parents? I argue very strongly that it should not be the government that demands that you wear school uniform. Certainly I think as a school community you should have a say in that; you should have a say whether you have a dress code in your school or not. A dress code might mean a school uniform or it might not. It should not be the government that dictates to you. You should have some responsibility for making that decision yourself.

I am sure you would agree, Mr Elasmr, that all the bright young people that we have in the chamber are quite capable of making decisions for themselves. You are quite capable of making decisions for yourselves, aren't you? Therefore I think you should have some say in whether you should wear a school uniform or a dress code or not. Indeed if you need some help at times you can go to your parents for advice. I say it should not be the government that demands that of you but it should be you, your parents and your school community that has some say in that.

Mr Elasmr also mentioned the fact that perhaps if we all wore school uniforms it would reduce the incidence of bullying. We would all feel part of the same so we would be less likely to be picked on. If we have uniformity in school uniforms one would think that to reduce bullying perhaps everybody should look exactly the same and we all should wear the same school uniform. We have eight primary schools represented here today and each of them has a different school uniform, or not a uniform in the case of perhaps a couple of schools. That does not mean that you are likely to be bullied or not, or picked on by somebody else in your school community or somebody from another school. If a bully is going to bully you, they will do it regardless of what clothes you are wearing. I do not suggest that having a school uniform and making people look the same will necessarily reduce the incidence of bullying.

I also want to comment about the cost of school uniform. Some suggest to parents that it is less costly if we have a school uniform. But you would know that you have separate clothes to wear on the weekends and for after school. You do not wear your school uniform when you go to the footy or the netball at the weekend; you have to have different clothes for doing that. The rate of growth of some of you young people — probably a couple of years ago you were just little tackers and now you are growing up into quite big, strong young men and women — means you grow out of your clothes quickly as you would well know. It does not mean to say that necessarily you could perhaps use the same set of clothes of a weekend; you could wear those to school equally well and before you actually grow out of them get the maximum wear. At the moment mum and dad sometimes have to go to the expense of buying a new set of clothes in blues or reds or greens or yellows — different school uniforms.

It is an additional cost for parents, and I do not think it is necessarily a strong argument that wearing a school uniform reduces costs for parents. Indeed some dress codes require very exacting standards from manufacturers — for example, having to have special skirts, tops or shorts when sometimes you can buy things a lot more cheaply at

Target and other department stores than from school uniform suppliers. The cost factor is not a strong one. Costs will not necessarily be reduced for parents if we have school uniforms.

The point I want to make in conclusion on the arguments against compulsory school uniforms is that it should not be for the government to impose them upon people. If we are truly serious about community consultation, we should listen to you today and take your advice when it comes to dress codes for your schools. It should not be for the government to dictate to you to wear a school uniform; that should be for you, for your parents and for your school community. That is what I strongly believe. I urge you all in your contributions to this debate today to think very seriously, and I hope at least some of you will agree with me and oppose this bill to make school uniforms compulsory in Victoria.

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Clause 3

Mr FACEY — I am the vice-captain of Benalla Primary School, a school of about 200 students, situated 200 kilometres north of Melbourne in north-east Victoria. I will be speaking to clause 3, 'Schools to establish uniform policy'. Our school has a uniform policy which stipulates the wearing of a choice of uniform items with navy and gold being the primary colours. The uniform consists of navy shorts or pants, a polo shirt and windcheater, both with our school logo, a sleeveless polar fleece vest or a school dress. The senior students also have the option to purchase a polo shirt with all the names of the year 6 students on the back. Currently our teachers have the option to purchase school jackets or polo shirts, but that is not compulsory. All teachers are provided with a badge with the school number 31 in navy and gold for easy identification. About six years ago the school logo on our uniforms was updated. The change gave a more modern look and was accepted as a positive move.

Wearing a school uniform makes us feel more included, creates less competition between students and allows them to concentrate on their education and not cool clothes. Some schools choose not to have a uniform, believing that students should be accepted for who they are and what they can achieve, not for what they wear. This is probably more of an issue for higher secondary classes. School photos also look smart with everyone in uniform. Some schools include more than just clothing in their uniform policy. Our school offers parents the choice of purchasing a school backpack with the school logo on it. The backpack may be a little more expensive than others, because it is designed to adjust to the various sizes of students and their different needs. Other uniform policy rules need to cover jewellery, hair colour, make-up and piercings to avoid unnecessary individual student attention. Our Benalla Primary School uniform policy is supported by both children and parents, with 99 per cent of students wearing the school uniform.

Mr FERNANDO — I am school captain at Laburnum Primary School. I wish to speak to clause 3. Our school uniform policy contains a broad set of guidelines; however, it is possible that it now needs to be reviewed to give more specific details including uniform choices. Now that we have been through this process, we feel that we need to update our policy to add more details. As school captain I would also like to see students having a say in our school uniform policy, because we are the ones it directly affects. At our school we believe that wearing a school uniform is a good idea for the following reasons: we do not have to decide and be worried about what to wear to school; it identifies us at school excursions; we have pride in our school; and finally, it gives us a sense that we belong at our school. We believe that students should have a school uniform that is comfortable to wear to and from school and have the choice of wearing accessories such as hats and more. We also believe that uniforms should be worn only at school and only when we are representing the school out of school hours. Most students at our school wear complete uniform, and there are lots of uniform choices. At this stage our policy does not enforce wearing the school uniform, although it may be a consideration in the future for our school.

At this stage we like our school uniform. Our school colours of green and gold fit in perfectly with the local environment, as Blackburn is such a flora-and-fauna-concerned area. Our school logo consists of an 'L' for Laburnum and some leaves representing the kind of area we live in. At our school we think people should be allowed to have the haircut of their choice as long as it does not affect their learning; however, we also believe that everyone should have their natural hair colour as opposed to dyeing or adding an unnatural colour to it. At our school we also think that boys and girls should not be allowed to wear make-up, apart from lip balm, so that they do not spend half their day worrying about how they look. We feel the same way about their wearing any kind of jewellery apart from a single stud or sleeper in the ear or a simple bracelet around the wrist. We also think school staff should not dress in suits and ties but rather smart-looking casual outfits.

Miss RICHARDSON — I am from Spensley Street Primary School, and I am going to speak against clause 3. Firstly, we would like to state that we do not believe a school uniform is necessary for all schools in Victoria; however it should be necessary for all schools to establish a dress code policy. Our dress code policy recognises health and safety requirements, including safe footwear, a SunSmart component, a need for freedom of expression and a respect of cultural diversity and allows people to dress according to their financial situation.

In reference to clause 3(2)(b) and (c) we believe you do not need a uniform to take pride in your school because students should not be judged on their appearance but on their behaviour and their choices. Furthermore our school already presents a positive image to the community, by opening its doors to parents and prospective parents and by the way our students present themselves in and out of the school grounds. The fact that we do not have a uniform is part of our positive image because students display individuality and are taught to respect each other's differences.

In reference to clause 3(3)(a) and (c), we feel as long as you are a committed and motivated learner it should not matter how many studs you have, what colour your hair is, or if you have stubble. How your look does not change how you behave in class or what your learning abilities are, which is what we think school is about. In reference to clause 3(5), we think it is important for staff and students to abide by the same standards of the dress code. In conclusion, a dress code allows students to make their own decisions but still take some responsibility for dressing safely and appropriately.

Mr HALL — Thank you very much, Anna, on again a very good contribution to this debate. Our last speaker on this particular clause of the bill will be from Surfside Primary School, which is down at Ocean Grove.

Mr BURGESS — I am in grade 5 at Surfside Primary School and I am talking about clause 3, the uniform policy. Our school has a uniform code; it involves wearing a uniform every day. I think it is good to wear a uniform because it is safe and neat. There is a summer and winter uniform choice, and also a boys and girls choice at Surfside, which is good because the students get to choose what uniform they would like to wear. You should wear your school uniform properly after school as well as in school because when you leave the school grounds you are still representing the school. A good uniform looks neat and outstanding and most people should like it.

I think teachers should wear some kind of uniform just like the students do. Students should have to wear school uniform every day unless it is a special occasion or you have a note. I do not know why some schools in Victoria do not have a uniform, because I think it is important to represent your school and respect your school's policy. At Surfside we have a pretty strict uniform policy, and I do not think student would like it any stricter. Schools make rules about make-up and bad hair cuts because the principal cares and wants the students to look good when they are representing the school when they are out on an excursion. Students should also wear sensible jewellery and have nice haircuts.

Mr ELASMAR — Thank you. That concludes the statements. Now we move to uniform policy amendments. I call Benalla Primary School.

Mr SCHNEIDER — I move:

1. That clause 3(2) be amended to delete the words 'be traditional and attractive'.

We believe traditional clothing could include blazers and ties or warm clothing. These would be costly and harder to care for. The term 'attractive' will mean different things to different people. Something might be attractive one year and not the next.

Mr HALL — Mr Schneider has moved an amendment that clause 3(2) of the bill be amended by deleting the words 'be traditional and attractive'. I do not know if anybody else in the chamber would like to make a comment on that, either for or against that amendment. Do you think it is a good idea or a bad idea to take out those words? Just think about that for a moment, or you can talk just quietly amongst people in your own school about whether you think you should take out the words 'be traditional and attractive'. Does any school want to say something quickly, whether in favour or against the amendment to remove the words 'be traditional and attractive'?

Miss O'CONNOR — We believe it might cause some offence to some people.

Miss ROACH — We think the uniforms should be original, but also should have some traditional appearances.

Miss BOSELEY — We think the words ‘traditional and attractive’ should be cut out.

Miss SHAW — I reckon that ‘traditional’ should still be in there, but not ‘attractive’.

Mr HALL — That makes it hard to vote on, doesn’t it? We are going to ask you to vote on whether we should delete ‘be traditional and attractive’; we cannot just delete one, it is both or none at all.

Amendment agreed to.

Miss RUTH — I move:

2. Delete the whole of clause 3(5) which requires uniform policies to include a dress code for staff.

We believe that this clause should be deleted because we feel that a dress code for staff is a separate issue.

Amendment negatived.

Mr SCHNEIDER — I move:

3. To add the following words to the end of clause 3(5) ‘requires staff to wear an identifying badge, bearing the school logo’.

We made this amendment so it would be easy to identify staff on excursions, also to make the staff look like they are part of the school community and not just some random person.

Mr HALL — Sam’s amendment is requiring staff to not only follow a school dress code for staff, but also that the staff of the school wear a badge. Does anyone want to speak in favour of that or against that? If you think the staff people should wear a badge, you will vote in favour.

Amendment negatived.

Miss REES-WEMYSS — I move:

4. To add the following words to the end of clause 3 ‘Schools that do not currently have a school uniform are exempted from all aspects of the bill, except those associated with SunSmart and safe attire’.

At SKPPS we dress neatly and observe SunSmart and safe attire. This is our dress code. We do not see the need to enforce a compulsory uniform.

Mr ELASMAR — Would anyone like to speak for it or against the amendment? There are no speakers. All in favour. Against.

Amendment negatived.

Mr HALL — We are now moving on to clause 4, which is for a uniform policy to be enforced. Again we are going to have four schools speaking on this particular provision.

The Clerk tells the people in the chair when they do something wrong, and I have done something wrong. What we have to do at the end of a clause is adopt that clause. We have amended it, so I have to say to you, ‘The question is that the amended clause be agreed to’. Those in favour put up their hand to say yes. What I am explaining is this: most of us, therefore, think that the school uniform policy should be there — that is, the provisions in clause 3. All but one or two schools argued for it, so we are saying that the clause as amended be agreed to. So if you think the school uniform policy is a good idea and the changes we made, then put up your hand. Those who are against that — thank you for those two schools as well. The clause is agreed to.

Amended clause agreed to.

Clause 4

Mr HALL — We move on to the next clause, which is clause 4, ‘Uniform policy to be enforced’. It is about the enforcement of school uniform policy. There will be four speakers again, and the first of those is Belvedere Park Primary School.

Miss HARRY — I am in year 6. I am going to talk about how our uniform policy is enforced at our school. All children at our school are expected to wear their uniform at our school every day. If someone is out of uniform, the teacher will ask for a letter explaining why they are out of their uniform. The letter might say something like, 'My child is out of uniform because the uniform is in the wash', 'it is damaged and getting fixed' or 'the uniform is lost'. There is no consequence for this. If the student comes to school out of uniform and does not have a note, then they will be given an out-of-uniform notice to take home to their parents. I think this is appropriate because it is a good way of communicating with the parents and it gives the child another day to get their uniform organised. If the students are still out of uniform, the principal or assistant principal will phone the parent. If this does not help, the principal or assistant principal will arrange a meeting with the parents of the child to find out the problem and see if they can help in some way.

When our school has an assembly, the principal and teachers give praise to the students for wearing their school uniforms and tell them how good they look. If a student is wearing jewellery other than a single bracelet or stud or sleeper earrings, it is taken off them until the end of the day and they are then told not to bring it to school again. Sometimes exemptions are made for special circumstances such as religious reasons. Our school is SunSmart, which means we wear school hats. The school hats have two styles, which are cap and wide brim, which we wear during terms 1 and 4 out in the playground so we do not get sunburnt. If a student is not wearing their school hat, they are restricted to a shady area.

Students sometimes break the uniform rules because they do not like the uniform. These are similar to the reasons why students misbehave during class. Breaking the uniform policy and breaking normal school rules should have different consequences. It is not appropriate for students to miss classes for being out of uniform because sometimes it is not their fault. If you recognise or reward the students who do wear school uniform, the students who do not wear the uniform will get upset and will want to wear the uniform so they can also be recognised. The uniform enforcement should be the same for all ages, because it is unfair if the policy is not the same to everybody. Occasionally we have a free-dress day to raise money for a special cause.

Miss BOYLE — The uniform policy at our school is different to some other schools in a way where we do not enforce the uniform policy. When parents come to enrol their children at our school they are advised to follow the rules, which include the uniform policy even though it is not compulsory. If parents or children do not fancy the uniform, they can come dressed in school colours and it will be accepted. We believe that students in uniform behave better if they are all wearing the same thing. No-one stands out because no-one is different. With the uniform there is no competition to be seen wearing fashionable or expensive brand names. It reduces the stress and bullying on kids that wear the uniform. If kids are getting teased, it should not be necessary because actually the bully is wearing the uniform too, so, again, no-one stands out. It is no good if a teacher punishes a child during class time when it can easily be done in free time like recess or lunch. The punishment should vary. It should not be compared to someone who has physically hurt another student. A stern talking to the parent and child should be it and within days the matter should be resolved.

At our school there is no need to punish kids since there is no uniform policy, where at a school with a uniform the punishments can vary. In the case of someone who is not very well financially supported and cannot afford a uniform, the child will be punished for not having a uniform, and, as we all know, they can be quite expensive. At our school we have a second-hand uniform shop where kids can resell their uniform for a cheaper price. If schools do not have one, we would encourage them to open one for kids to enjoy their school experiences without the hassles. Therefore we conclude that schools and teachers should have guidelines to follow as to what punishments there are and they must apply them equally to all students.

Mr HALL — Thank you, Georgia, for that very good statement. We will come back to St Kilda Park Primary School; we will go to Traralgon (Stockdale Road) Primary School.

Miss BEATTIE — We are here to speak about the enforcement of a uniform policy and how this can be best done so that it is fair for all. When students have school uniform on, they are ready to work and are not silly because they are representing the school. When they do not wear uniform, they go silly and think they do not have to do anything; they think it is a free day where they can do anything they want. When it comes to enforcing the uniform policy, I believe that if a child is out of uniform, the teacher must ask for a note. For repeat offenders the teacher should contact the parent or guardian concerned and ask why. If there is no reason, the teacher may confiscate the item of clothing. We do not think children out of school uniform should be out of class for very long.

They should get some uniform from lost property at recess. If it is something like a top under the school polo, then they should have to take it off in the next break and be told they are not allowed to wear it at school again.

We think that students who misbehave should be treated the same as others who break school rules, because misbehaving can be caused by a number of things, but generally it is all about choices. We also believe there should be similar punishments for breaking uniform rules as there are for our normal school rules. They are the school rules and every student must obey them. Teachers should not waste any of the student's learning time to discipline them. They should make the child waste their own time, maybe at recess or lunchtime or even after school. The time spent should be 30 minutes to 45 minutes at the most. As a reward, the students who have been in school clothing for the whole month should go into a raffle to win a prize. The winners of this prize should be put in the newsletter as well as all the students that did the right thing and wore the uniform every day. The prizes could get better as the year goes on with the ultimate prize being something that all students would love to win. We believe that uniform enforcement should not be different for students of different ages. The following should be done: verbal reminders to students; work in school lunchtimes — for example, gardening, sweeping and cleaning; no suspension or expulsion can happen if a child is out of uniform.

Miss REES-WEMYSS — Our school, St Kilda Park Primary School, has never had a uniform. This is not a problem in our school community. We dress according to a code which takes into account safety, weather conditions, sport programs, comfort and practicality. We look neat and are easily distinguishable when on excursions; our teachers have never lost any of us. We do not feel that the lack of a uniform affects school spirit in any way. Our parents like us wearing casual clothes as we get more wear out of them before they get too small. Our teachers like the way we express our individuality through our clothes. They like us dressing in our own separate styles.

However, we are aware that everyone is entitled to a different opinion. We have studied clause 4 of the bill and discussed it with all the grades 5s and 6s. There were many conflicting ideas. We thought the term 'disciplinary measures' sounded very stern, and would like consequences submitted instead. We have come to the following decisions. The first three points were left as they were because they are extremely fair and reasonable and take into account the individual child. To clause 4(4)(b) we added the phrase 'to repeatedly breaking uniform rules' because detention is a very severe consequence for a single offence. Subclauses (5) and (6) deal with not interfering with teaching and learning while enacting a consequence. We agreed these were reasonable and we passed them. We feel that subclause (7) is unfair and we changed the confiscation of non-uniform items from the end of the term to the end of the week. We think subclause (8) is fair since there would be a good reason for the exemption. We noticed that subclause (9) was badly worded. We changed 'presence in the class presents a risk to their own or other's safety' to 'a risk to the wellbeing of others. For schools with a uniform we think these changes are fair and realistic and will make the bill more student friendly and acceptable to all. In its present state this clause is not attractive to school children as it seems to highlight punishment and not encourage obedience to school uniform policy.

Mr HALL — Thank you for that. Ruby has foreshadowed what she is going to talk about when she moves her amendment, so that was good work to do that. Well done.

We are now moving to the amendments to clause 4 of the bill. The first amendment is going to be moved by Laburnum Primary School.

Mr KARKLINS — I move:

5. Delete the word 'detention' from clause 4(4).

We feel as a primary school this punishment of detention is too harsh for primary-aged students.

Mr HALL — Max has moved an amendment which means that one of the punishments that should not be allowed is detention if you do not wear your school uniform. Would anybody like to speak for or against that?

Miss VAN DORSEN — I think there should not be a punishment if they are out of uniform, but if they constantly do it the time should be taken from snack time or lunchtime.

Mr HALL — Do you think they should have a detention?

Miss VAN DORSSSEN — Yes.

Mr CARLEI — Repeat offenders should get detention, but for the first time you should only get a warning.

Mr HOCKING — I think they should just be warned to wear their uniform.

Mr HALL — We have had a few opinions on that. Just to clearly explain to you what is happening, we have an amendment which will remove the detention provision from the enforcements. If you agree with this it means that you agree there should not be detention just because you are out of school uniform. All those in favour of removing detention. The amendment is carried. You will not have any more detentions for not wearing school uniform.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr KROKER — I move:

6. Amend the second sentence of clause 4(7) to 'Confiscated items must be returned to students no later than the end of the week'.

We considered that keeping items for so long was similar to stealing. A week would teach a student the consequence of bringing or wearing non-uniform items.

Mr ELASMAR — The amendment means that the clause will read 'the end of the week' rather than 'the end of the term'. Would anyone like to speak for or against?

Mr AITKEN — When you wear something you might not have it taken off you for a week. It depends on when you have it taken off you. If it is at the start of the term it should be at the start of the week, but if it is, say, week 8, then you should have it taken off you until the end of term.

Miss RICHARDSON — I think you should have it taken away until the end of the week. If it happens again the time that it is taken away should be increased.

Miss HARRY — I think they should get it back by the end of the week because their parents might wonder where it is. It is a bit like stealing if it is kept any longer.

Mr ELASMAR — The amendment is that the item should be confiscated until the end of the week instead of the end of the term. I ask the people who support it to raise their hands. Now the people against it. The ayes have it.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr HALL — Well done for being so brave and to vote for yourself. We are almost right on time now, so that is terrific. We are now going to move on to clause 5 of the bill which is titled 'Uniform policy to ensure student — —

Mr ELASMAR — We have not voted yet.

Mr HALL — Mr Elasmarr tells me that we have done it wrong again. We have to ask one more question. We have to vote on whether we agree to the clause that we have changed. I ask those people who agree with clause 4 as amended to put their hands up. I think everybody has spoken in favour. Good. Those against? Okay, apart from a few, that is carried.

Amended clause agreed to.

Clause 5

Mr HALL — We now move on to clause 5 of the bill which is about uniform policy to ensure student health and safety. The first to talk about health and safety of school uniforms is going to be Surfside Primary School.

Miss NEAL — I am in grade 5 at Surfside Primary School. Surfside Primary School is in Ocean Grove on the Bellarine Peninsula. The clause that I am speaking to is clause 5. I am going to talk about the health and safety aspects of our school uniform. Our school uniform and dress code helps keep us safe and healthy, especially providing protection from the sun. We have a ‘no hat, no play’ policy for terms 1 and 4. The hats permitted are broadbrimmed and legionnaire-style hats which provide maximum protection. Our school tops are available in short sleeve or long sleeve. The shirt sleeves still cover most of the arm up to the elbow. The collar on the polo tops also protects the back of the neck. Feet are to be covered and thongs are not permitted. Long hair should be tied back and dangling earrings are not allowed. Because of the ‘no hat, no play’ policy, students may be tempted to borrow hats. This could be a health risk due to head lice.

A school uniform makes students easier to identify. This provides benefits for teachers, especially outside the school grounds — for example, on excursions. It also brings attention to a child that leaves the school during school times without a parent. Being easy to identify could also pose a risk to a child because it makes it obvious to predators where the child attends school. How people dress can affect their emotional as well as physical health. If you are not comfortable with the way you are dressed it can affect your self-confidence, but people should not feel too bad because in uniform everybody looks the same. It is very important for a school uniform to be comfortable because you have to wear it for over 6 hours a day. It should be attractive as it represents your school and it needs to be affordable if everyone has to have it.

If a school does not have a uniform, I believe it is still important that there are dress rules for health and safety reasons. It is important that teachers have rules regarding dressing safely, especially for sun protection when they are outside the classroom — for example, doing yard duty. Otherwise it seems unfair when they make us wear hats. Teachers should also wear practical footwear. I think that older students are less likely to dress safely — for example, older students do not like to wear legionnaire-style hats as they are daggy. Broadbrimmed hats fly off and you do not want to chase them when it is hot and windy. Cords on hats are daggy and are a safety risk if other children pull the cord tight. At our school students love to play sport. Hats can block your view and make it very hard to catch balls. It is important that older students have to follow the same rules as younger students because the younger students look up to them and copy them. I think the best way to get older students to comply with uniform dress codes is to allow them to be involved in the design and have input into the rules set. Thank you for listening to our opinions.

Mr HALL — Very good, Danielle. You had 2 seconds left so you timed that to perfection. Well done.

Mr CROKER — Our school is arguing that students should have the right not to wear a uniform for many reasons. However, although we insist that a school uniform is not necessary we think a policy on dress codes is important, and that there should be some health and safety requirements. Our dress code already addresses all the health and safety requirements while allowing freedom of expression. Our dress code invites all students to be responsible. Students are encouraged to wear clothing with the school logo on special occasions such as school excursions or other public events, but the main requirements for these occasions is sensible and appropriate behaviour.

One reason against uniforms is cost. If you have a uniform you will need a summer, a winter and a sporting uniform. This would cost a lot of money and not everybody could afford it. Another reason against uniforms is the hassle of frequently changing them. A lot of students with uniforms would like to run around at break times, but they are put off because they have to change into their sporting uniforms and then change back into their normal uniforms. Not all students want to do this. A further reason against uniforms is they wear out way too quickly. If you wear one uniform for a week it becomes worn out very quickly. However, if you wear casual clothes for a day it is much less likely for them to wear out.

We think freedom of expression is the most important reason to take a stand against uniforms. If you do not have a uniform you can choose what you wear. For example, some girls, like my sister, may not want to wear a dress but are forced to because it is the uniform policy of the school. If they did not have a uniform they could wear pants and they would not have to be in the school colours. We believe one of the reasons you go to school is to get confidence in yourself and in your style. Every day, if you choose what clothes and accessories you wear, and how you have your hair, you learn a lot about yourself. However, uniforms stop you from learning this. We think it is important to allow people to choose their clothes and accessories. We also think it is important to respect people’s backgrounds and religious beliefs. If all the students were to wear a uniform, those students wearing religious items could be targeted as being different and could easily feel left out. We believe students should have the right not to

wear a uniform. Freedom of expression is especially important in Victoria because there is so much cultural diversity. Having a sense of belonging does not come from looking the same.

Miss COHN — I am the school captain at Laburnum Primary School. I am here to talk about clause 5 which is ‘Uniform policy to ensure student health and safety’. At Laburnum primary it is compulsory to wear sun protective hats outside in terms 1 and 4. There are a number of uniform options which means that students can wear a uniform that is comfortable and is sun protective. Most students wear runners that are slip-proof, that have closed toes and are suitable for sporting activities. At our school we are required to wear school uniform on school excursions and out-of-school-hours school activities. The school logo on our uniform identifies that we are from Laburnum Primary School; however, we do not necessarily wear name tags that identify us. Our school does not require a specific sports uniform, because we feel that our uniform is appropriate for sporting activities. The only exception to this is that some sporting teams, such as the soccer team, have a specific uniform. At our school we find our uniform comfortable, it is reasonably priced and the majority of students like to wear it.

We believe schools that do that do not have a school uniform should still have some rules relating to health and safety such as sun-protective hats in terms 1 and 4, no sleeveless tops, no open-toed shoes, no tight-fitting clothing and no miniskirts for girls. It should be left to teachers’ discretion to dress appropriately, safely and as role models for students. We believe a dress code for teachers is a separate issue. We believe health and safety rules should apply to all year levels. We think UV-protective sunglasses for students in primary schools would be difficult to achieve due to their cost. They are expensive, and there is the potential for young children to lose or damage the sunglasses. We therefore see sunglasses as an optional item in school uniforms.

We also believe shirts with elbow-length sleeves are impractical for sporting activities, and many T-shirts have cap sleeves rather than elbow-length sleeves. The use of sunscreen is a protection for exposed skin. We think the wearing of jewellery in schools should be kept to an absolute minimum — for example, a single stud or sleeper in the ear and the wearing of a cross for religious reasons. If schools do not have a separate sports uniform, students should be permitted to wear their uniform all day on days when they have physical education or sporting activities.

Miss McNAMARA — I am the vice-captain of Benalla school no. 31. I am pleased to contribute to the debate on clause 5, ‘Uniform policy to ensure student health and safety’. Our uniform provides comfort and flexibility which enable us to wear it in both the classroom and for physical education activities. In Benalla temperatures can rise to above 40 degrees and below 4 degrees in winter, and our uniform allows us to adjust to these extreme temperatures. In terms 1 and 4 we wear our broadbrimmed hats, which protect not only our faces but the sides of our heads as well. We feel that legionnaire-style hats do not offer enough protection. Our uniform policy prohibits the wearing of any piercing other than studs or sleepers in the ear. Our school logo proudly identifies us to our school community on interschool sports days and school excursions. We believe a compulsory uniform should address all the issues of health and safety, including SunSmart, versatility of activity and comfortable design options, and at the same time be a fashionable but practical design.

Mr HALL — There are two amendments to be moved to clause 5, the first by Benalla Primary School.

Mr SCHNEIDER — I move:

7. Amend clause 5(1)(a) to ‘thongs or open-toed sandals’.

We decided to move this amendment for the following reasons: you can get bee stings and ant bites on your toes; you can stub your toes on twigs and school-ground equipment; you can get snakebites; thongs are not safe for riding to and from school; and whatever we wear to school is what we wear for sport, and running in sandals is hard.

Mr HALL — What Sam is proposing to do is add open-toed sandals. The bill currently says you are not allowed to wear thongs. Sam is saying you should also not be allowed to wear open-toed sandals. Does anyone want to speak for or against that amendment?

Miss VAN DORSEN — I say you are not allowed to wear open-toed sandals because you can stub your toe on the gravel, and it really hurts. I have had that happen to me before.

Miss LEE — I believe we should not wear thongs but should be allowed to wear sandals, because in summer when it gets really hot, if you are wearing runners and socks, your feet can get really sweaty and start to smell.

Mr HALL — Catherine is against the amendment. Does anybody else want to speak for or against?

Miss SENGSTOCK — I think closed-toed shoes and lace-ups are the most appropriate for all school times especially because when you are just mucking around with friends and running around, if you are in sandals, you can easily trip over and suffer an injury.

Amendment agreed to.

Miss COHN — I move:

8. Amend clause 5(2)(d) to delete the words 'UV-protective sunglasses outside during terms 1 and 4'.

We believe having sunglasses would be difficult to achieve in primary schools due to the cost. They are expensive, and there is the potential for young children to lose or damage sunglasses. While we want to encourage it, it should not be compulsory as part of primary school uniforms.

Mr AITKEN — It should be optional; if people want to wear them, they should wear them.

Mr HOCKING — Sunglasses can fall off easily, and some are hard to see through.

Miss ROACH — I think we should not have to wear sunglasses, because at our school we already wear brimmed hats which shield our eyes from the sun.

Mr STEGER — I think it should be optional for people in grade prep to grade 2, and people above that should have to wear them.

Miss HARRY — I do not think they should have sunglasses because little kids could lose them and they could get damaged, and sometimes they could be hard to replace.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Mr HALL — Before we move on to the next clause I am going to ask you two questions, so have a think about them. Some of the things the Education and Training Committee will be considering are not contained within this bill directly, and primary school students might have a different view from secondary school students. We just spoke in this session about health and safety and some of you spoke about hats, caps, bucket hats and string hats, and a few of you made different comments. Some schools have said to us that primary school kids are pretty good at wearing sunhats, but they are not so good when moving to secondary school. Do you think you would be happy to wear a sunhat when you go to secondary school?

Mr CARLEI — If you are the only one wearing it, I would not be happy because you might get teased or bullied.

Mr HALL — Do you think everybody at secondary school should wear a sunhat, like you are required to do now?

Mr CARLEI — In the summer terms, but maybe not in the spring.

Miss RICHARDSON — It would depend what type of hat it was, because, like one of the other students was saying, some of the hats are a bit daggy. So if you are making a uniform policy then you have to make sure the hats are suitable for high school students.

Mr HALL — What is not a daggy hat?

Miss RICHARDSON — I do not really know.

Mr HALL — Do you like those buckets hats like they wear down the beach?

Miss RICHARDSON — Yes, bucket hats are all right.

Mr STEGER — At most high schools — the high school I am going to — wearing a hat is optional. I think most students do not wear them, and I am not really sure if I will.

Mr HALL — All right. I am going to ask one other question too before I move on to the next clause. We had a submission from the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, and they told us about SunSmart programs, et cetera, which I think most schools adopt, and from what you have said today you generally agree with. The Anti-Cancer Council believes that in summer you should have a top that goes below your elbows to protect you from sunburn and therefore, later on in life, melanomas and things like that. So what do you think of that idea about requiring in summer to wear a sun-protective top that goes right below your elbows?

Miss O'CONNOR — I believe you should, because they might come back and sue you later on if they have got cancer or something from it.

Mr HEARD — I reckon you should not wear a top down to your elbows, because you could just put sunscreen on the rest of the way.

Mr HALL — I am trying to pick the schools that did not answer a question in the last one. I think Essendon is next.

Miss ROACH — I think we should not have to wear a top that goes down to our elbows, because it would cause you a lot of discomfort if you were wearing it and it was really hot. Also if you were sitting in a classroom and trying to learn and you were still in a lot of discomfort, I think that it would not be of benefit to wear that.

Miss McNAMARA — I think that buying a different shirt for summer would be too expensive. We already have a short-sleeved shirt for all year round. It would be too expensive to buy one for just summer.

Mr HALL — A good point to make.

Mr RAKOCI — I reckon you should not wear long-sleeved tops, because people would roll them up any way. When you play sport they would get too hot.

Mr HALL — Good point. I know lots of you have opinions on that, but that is helpful that we have just had a couple of people at least being able to say something.

Clause 6

Mr ELASMAR — We will now move on to clause 6 relating to equity and exemptions. I believe that two speakers from Traralgon (Stockdale Road) Primary School are going to share the next topic. I will leave it up to them as to who will start first.

Miss SHAW — I really like my school and what it has to offer to such a wide range of students. The uniform at our school is something I definitely feel proud of wearing. Some schools believe that to look the same is important, and some schools believe it is up to the students what they wear. I believe students should wear a uniform as it makes them feel part of the school community and connected with their peers. This way all students develop a better relationship between each other and have a real sense of belonging and self-worth.

Mr AITKEN — When you attend activities outside of school it is easy to recognise which students go to each of the schools in our town. Representing our town in sport is something most of us love to do, and with our unique uniform it makes us all proud no matter how well we do.

Miss SHAW — Although our school does not have many religious families, I believe if there are some new students enrolled then their religion should not be a problem. Religious people should still get to wear their religious clothing, and religious people should be allowed to go to any government school that they or their families choose. My family goes to church and at the moment my family cannot afford a private school, and I know that I am not the only one around who is like that.

Mr AITKEN — We believe our school uniform is unique, because we are the only primary school in the area with yellow and royal blue as our colours. Our uniform is great not only because of our colours and the wide

range of acceptable uniform items, but because of the fact that kids who do not have a lot of money can come in uniform and not worry about what they are wearing or how bad their clothes might look. Our school has many families that get government assistance and yet almost all of our students come to school each day in their uniform. This is because our school community has a great respect for our school.

Mr HALL — Thank you for that. I reckon that was a first for the Victorian Parliament, to have two speakers on the one speech. Mr Elasmar, we might have a go at that the next time around.

Mr ELASMAR — Good idea.

Mr HALL — And confuse Hansard terribly!

The next contribution is going to be from St Kilda Park Primary School.

Miss SENGSTOCK — Firstly, I would like to express the fact that our school, St Kilda Park, does not have a uniform and has no plans to change this position in the foreseeable future. We have discussed this clause with all grade 5s and 6s in order to obtain their opinions. There are points in clause 6 of the bill that we like but still feel need further discussion. I would like to take some time to elaborate on these. Subclause (5) refers to exemptions for people going through financial hardship. We agree with this as we do not want to single out people who are disadvantaged. Subclause (6) refers to how the school can reject certain requests for an exemption not listed in the bill. We do not disagree as we feel that nearly all of the problems a student may experience with the uniform are covered. We feel that if an individual has a problem, the school and student will be able to work something out. We are pleased that the bill ensures confidentiality for all personal details and circumstances regarding exemptions. Otherwise it would be very demoralising for all concerned.

However, there are also certain points that we do not agree with. I would like to take time to comment on these. Subclause (1) suggests that there should be different designs and sizes to suit all body shapes. We consider it is not correct to emphasise this at a time when body image is an important issue with many students. In subclauses (2) and (3) the bill deals with the wearing of religious items. We do not feel it is necessary to list examples from the main religions whilst ignoring others. We would like the clause to be more general and give students the right to wear items according to the rules of their religion, without dictating colour. Regarding exemptions to wearing uniform, it is not necessary to list all possible reasons. We would like a very general statement that covers all matters concerning health, welfare and comfort. When there are conflicts over the wearing of a uniform, we suggest that the school council should be the final decision-maker, as it represents all sections of the school community. We do not agree with compulsory wearing of a uniform but we acknowledge the right of others to have one.

Miss ROACH — A uniform's purpose is to symbolise that you are from a certain school and proud of it, so not having a uniform would not engage you in the school and its community. Wearing a uniform shows that you are different from other schools and organisations. At our school our uniform associates us with our community because we wear red and black — the colours of the mighty Bombers. At school kids may be bullied simply because of what they wear, and this is not right. Uniforms will hopefully decrease the change of any bullying.

We were divided on the issue of religious attire being worn at school. Some of us strongly believe that students should not be able to wear items that interfere with the uniform because when a student enrolls in a school they should know the uniform and should have to agree with it before they enrol. If the school does not suit your needs, some of us believe that you should choose a school that does. Also, the whole point of a uniform is to make everyone feel equal, but once we start giving exemptions the bullying starts. The rest of us think that religious attire should be worn at any school because students should learn how to tolerate other religions, races and people since later in life they will be faced with this every day. We also feel that religious attire should be worn with the uniform because, like we said before, it will show that you are still part of the school. Also, uniforms make students more easily identifiable in school uniform. For example, if they are wagging, the school can be informed immediately. At our school we do not need to address this issue because our uniform is not compulsory.

Mr HALL — Thank you, Hayley. I agree with what you said except for the 'mighty Bombers'. We do not agree with that over here.

Miss SEMERTZIDIS — I am in grade 6 at Belvedere Park Primary School and I am going to talk about how our school uniform policy applies equally to all students with exemptions allowed. Our school uniform shows that we belong to Belvedere Park Primary School because of the combination of three factors: its unique colours —

gold and navy blue — our school emblem, and our school name. By wearing our uniform there is no competition between students about who is wearing the latest designs or the best labels or who has not got them because they cannot afford to buy them.

Our school uniform provides a choice between summer and winter clothing for both boys and girls. There are dresses, shorts, long pants, short or long-sleeve tops, and jackets in polar fleece or regular windcheater material. Our uniform is designed to be comfortable and practical for both inside the classroom and outside during PE. When we leave the school to go on excursions or are visiting other schools it is much easier to identify us if we are wearing our school uniform. This helps our students feel safe and makes it easier for the teachers to know where we are. Our students are proud to show that they represent Belvedere Park Primary School by wearing our uniform. It also shows where we come from. We have exemptions to our uniform which can be based on religious, cultural, health or disability reasons. We also have a transition period for new students where they are allowed to wear the school uniform from their previous school until the end of the term they enrolled in.

Mr ELASMAR — I believe there is one amendment and it is from St Kilda Park Primary School.

Miss SENGSTOCK — I move:

9. Amend clause 6(7)(a) to 'the decision whether to grant the requested exemption will be made by the school council'.

Amend clause 6(7)(b) to 'the student will continue attending school, either in or out of a uniform, while the school council considers its decision'.

The school council elected by the school community is the heart of our school. It represents all parents, teachers and children and is in the best position to make decisions.

Mr ELASMAR — The amendment is to change the words 'education department' to 'school council'. Would anyone like to speak for or against the amendment?

Mr CARLEI — I would change it to 'school committee' because the school council that is elected by the school committee may have a different opinion, but if the school committee all vote for it and ask for it then it will be fair for everyone.

Miss SENGSTOCK — I would just like to say that our school does not even have a school committee, and I do not know many schools in our area that do.

Mr ELASMAR — I will put the amendment. All those in favour should raise their hands. Now all those against. The amendment is lost.

I will now ask you about clause 6. All those in favour should raise their hands. All those against. The clause is agreed to.

Amendments negatived; clause agreed to.

Mr HALL — We have 3 or 4 minutes before we have to move to the next clause, so again I am going to ask you a couple of questions, and it will be helpful to the committee for you to think about them. This clause is all about equity and fairness in school uniforms. One of the things that has been said to us as a committee is that some school uniform policies do not allow girls to wear shorts or trousers — that is, they require them to wear skirts and dresses. Do you think that is fair? I think most of the girls will probably have an opinion about this. Who has not said anything today?

Miss LESSING — I think girls should be able to wear shorts because some girls find them more comfortable. That goes for trousers as well.

Mr HALL — Good comment. Is there somebody else who has not had a say today who would like to say something?

Miss NARAIN — I think girls should be allowed to wear shorts and trousers as well.

Mr HALL — Is there anybody else who has not said anything today?

Miss RUTH — At our school girls can wear shorts and trousers if they want. I do not think it should be compulsory for girls to wear just dresses.

Mr HALL — There is one other question I want to ask you before we go on to the next clause. Again, you have to imagine where you will be in five or six years' time when you are doing year 11 or year 12 at secondary school. As you know, some secondary schools do not require a uniform for VCE students in years 11 and 12. Again, do you think that is fair? Do you think students in years 11 and 12 should be made to wear a school uniform?

Mr KROKER — I think years 11 and 12 students should be able to wear what they want because they are becoming adults and should be treated a bit more like adults.

Mr HALL — Good. Who has not spoken for a while?

Miss SHAYNE — I think secondary students should have to wear uniform until they finish school.

Mr SCHNEIDER — At Benalla College they have the option to wear school uniform. They should be able to wear what they want. It does not really matter.

Miss O'CONNOR — I believe they should still wear uniform because they have not yet left school.

Miss NELSON — I believe they should still have part of a uniform but not a complete uniform. It should be similar to the other uniform, but not completely the same.

Clause 7

Mr ELASMAR — We will move to the next clause which relates to costs and purchasing.

Mr HOCKING — We do not believe a school uniform policy is necessary for all schools, but a dress code policy is. We believe if schools were to have uniforms they should be cheap, Australian made and the school should have a flexible payment plan in order to purchase the said clothing. We do not the uniform's production to cause environmental damage or pollution. We do not want children or people to be exploited by big manufacturing companies. However, the uniform should be ethical and made of strong materials. On top of that it is likely that students will need two sets of uniforms because all the activities during school time could cause damage to the uniforms or they might need a wash. These considerations may cause the cost of the uniforms to rise.

The government and schools should provide full financial assistance to families with financial problems. Schools should have free second-hand clothes for students who cannot afford the uniform costs. Students should by no means feel embarrassed that they cannot afford the cost of a proper uniform. This is the main reason why I do not like uniforms because they may cause emotional distress to some families who cannot afford them. Also, everyone should be able to express their personality through the clothes they wear. I think a dress code should be applied to all schools in Victoria. Uniforms do not let you express yourself. They make everyone look the same, which I do not think shows that the students that go to the school are responsible enough to choose their own clothes. In conclusion I would not like to see people embarrassed or distressed because they do not have uniforms and because the school or government cannot help them with their financial problems.

Mr HALL — Thank you for that, Marcus. Before I call the next person we will take a short break and allow for photographs to be taken from where you are sitting.

We are now back to work and I call the next speaker from Benalla Primary School.

Miss LESSING — I am a grade 6 student and house captain at Benalla Primary School. I will be speaking on clause 7, 'Uniforms to reflect appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements'. Our school provides for the sale of new school uniforms at a shop within our school. We have a second-hand uniform shop which provides cheap clothing in good condition. Several years ago, after consultation with the school community, the parents club investigated and decided on our current uniform. They chose a non-traditional uniform which does not include a blazer, sports uniform or tie. The changes they made reflected the modern, durable fabrics which are easy to care for and are affordable for all families. Consideration was also given to the availability of clothing similar to our uniforms in local stores, such as Target, Kmart or BIG W. We believe children who wear these clothes, which are so similar in colour and style, should also be deemed as wearing school uniform.

Miss NARAIN — I am in grade 5 at Surfside Primary School in Ocean Grove. I am here to talk about clause 7, which relates to costs and purchasing arrangements. We have different types of clothing at our school. The polo top costs \$16 for sizes 4 to 10 and \$17 for sizes 12 to 16. The dresses at our school cost \$26 for sizes 4 to 10 and \$28 for sizes 12 to 16. I think it is cheaper to wear school uniform because you only have to buy about two of them, but you have to buy heaps of casual clothes and students worry about different trends. Part of the reason that school students wear uniforms is because they need to represent their school.

Some people do not want to buy the uniform and want to buy other things such as toys and clothes, but I think it is fair to wear the uniform. School is an important part of life, and students and their families should appreciate buying the uniform. If they want to buy other things, they should save up the money. They should love school because you only get one chance at it. Some students come from a poor or non-wealthy family. If a student has come from a family with very little money to spend on extras like school uniform the school might have to work out a situation where the family and the school are happy. At our school we have second-hand clothes. The polo top second-hand is about \$2, the dress is about \$3 and the shorts are about \$2. If a family cannot afford any type of clothing from the school it goes through a fund called the state schools relief fund. The school signs some papers, sends it to the supplier and the family picks up the uniform.

Mr HALL — Thank you, Indira. Well done.

Mr KARKLINS — I am the deputy school captain from Laburnum Primary School. Today I will be talking about clause 7 titled 'Uniforms to reflect appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements'. We agree with most of the points proposed in this clause. At our school we believe it is important to wear a school uniform. It is more equitable as students are seen as equals in the school. Students are identifiable to the public and ourselves at excursions and interschool sports events, and it is a cheaper option than casual clothes. It also creates a sense of community. At our school everyone is encouraged to wear a school uniform and there are many choices available — for example, dresses, shorts, pants, jumpers, choice of hats in terms 1 and 4, skirts and so on. Uniform items can be purchased at our school because it is convenient for parents.

Uniform prices are reasonable — for example, shorts, \$18; short-sleeved polo shirts, \$19; and bucket hats, \$9. Because our uniform colours are green and gold, some parents may choose to buy clothing items in places like Kmart and Big W and iron the logo onto these items, making the purchase of the uniform convenient and affordable. We believe school uniforms should be as cheap as possible so that they are affordable for all families. Another option is to purchase second-hand uniforms which are available at our school for reasonable prices.

Being a government school we believe every child has the right to be in school uniform. Families that are having financial problems can be assisted by options such as second-hand uniforms, lay-by arrangements, uniform loans and state schools relief funds, which it is the government's and schools' responsibility to provide. So that families are not embarrassed, we believe any alternative uniform arrangements should be between the principal of the school and the families concerned and not made public. Our belief is that parents or guardians in making a decision to send a child to a school must abide by the rules of that school, including its school policy.

The only point in this clause that we disagree with is the final point, which refers to clothing being made by Australian environmentally friendly companies. While it may be desirable to buy items of clothing that are Australian made, firstly, it is very hard to prove that companies are ethically or environmentally friendly, and secondly, this will most likely increase the prices of uniform items. Uniforms should be made from durable materials such as polyester and cotton, because primary school-aged children can be very active. Most clothing now comes from China and is more affordable and of similar quality. We believe there should be no profit made on the sale of uniforms at schools as it does not support the purpose of wearing a uniform, which I specified earlier. Profits can be made in other ways by the school community.

Miss BOSELEY — I move:

10. Amend clause 7(6) to 'Schools could endeavour to purchase uniforms from manufacturers who can demonstrate that their manufacturing is environmentally friendly, Australian made, and ethical and non-exploitative'.

It would be impossible for all schools to obtain uniforms made in Australia. There are very few Australian manufacturing businesses providing uniforms, and schools do not have the resources to research these requirements.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Mr HALL — We have a few minutes before the lunch break, so I will ask a couple of questions. First of all I want to know from you whether you think some items of your school uniform or dress code are unnecessary, whether they be trousers, polo tops, windcheaters or hats. Do you think there is any part of your school uniform that is unnecessary?

Miss RICHARDSON — Our school does not have a uniform, but for schools that have a uniform I reckon it is quite unnecessary to have a blazer. I know blazers cost a lot of money and if they are new they probably add \$100 to uniform costs. I think blazers are a bit unnecessary.

Mr HALL — How many agree that you should not have to have blazers? A clear majority of people agree with that point. Does anybody else have a view about things that might be unnecessary in their school uniform?

Mr CARLEI — Again, not at our school, but I do not think it is necessary to have a tie, because ties are expensive and really awkward to wear, as I have heard.

Miss VAN DORSEN — We are trying to get rid of jeans and different coloured tracksuit pants because they do not blend in with the school uniform.

Mr STEGER — I think black school shoes are unnecessary. Schools normally have sports shoes, which you have to change into. I think they are quite unnecessary.

Mr HALL — That is a good point. How many agree that shoes should not be part of your school uniform? Most of you said not to have thongs and open-toed sandals, so maybe all shoes except thongs and open-toed sandals, is that what you are agreeing to?

Let me ask you another question about school uniforms. Lots of school uniforms have a logo on them. I see quite a few schools have their logo on the polo tops, windcheaters and bomber tops. Maybe that adds some extra cost to the school uniform, and maybe buying a plain one from Target, Woolworths or other stores people have mentioned might be a bit cheaper. Do you think it is necessary to have school logos on our school uniforms?

Mr GILBERT — I think schools should have an emblem, because then people know where you go to school.

Mr COLLEY — I think they should have the logo, because the jumpers from here and there are exactly the same, and you would not be able to tell them apart.

Miss SHAW — I also reckon that we should have logos for the same point, because in a big gathering like this from different schools if you did not have a logo you could get lost.

Mr HALL — What if you went to school sports and the 100 kids at your school all had the same uniform, do you think you would be more likely to get lost then, if everyone had the same uniform?

Miss SHAW — No. That is why I reckon teachers should not have dress codes, so they can stand out as well if you get lost.

Miss NEAL — I reckon they should have logos because you can still buy the second-hand clothes, which are cheaper. So it does not really matter how much the logo adds on to the cost.

Mr KROKER — I think there should be a logo, because if you do not have one there is not really much point in having uniforms. If you represent your school and do not have a logo people could think you are from a different school.

Mr HALL — Let me move on and ask you one more question before we stop for lunch. As many of you have said here, the cost of the uniform is sometimes pretty expensive, but schools help out because they provide a second-hand uniform shop. What if there were not enough second-hand uniforms for buying? Who do you think should help those families that cannot afford to buy school uniforms?

Miss HARRY — I think the school community should pitch in, like having free-dress days to raise money to get more uniforms into the second-hand uniform shop, and they should put things in the newsletter.

Miss LEE — I think the government should help them get a school uniform. Is there not a rule that applies to everyone that your child has to have an education? So if the government is making them go to school and they cannot afford an uniform it should be helping them buy one.

Mr HALL — That is a good point: because you are made to go to school — school is compulsory in Victoria — you are arguing that because government makes you go to school it should be required to assist you if you cannot afford a school uniform; whereas the other speaker, Amber Harry, said it would be the school community that helps you out. Let us have a quick show of hands of who favours which view. Should it be the government that helps people buy school uniforms, or should it be the school council? Amber has changed her mind, has she? I think we have done pretty well. We will now break for lunch.

Proceedings suspended.

Clause 8

Mr ELASMAR — We hope you have all had a good lunch and a good break. We are now dealing with clause 8 on consultation and communication statements.

Mr STEGER — Before I start my speech I would like to say that St Kilda Park Primary School does not have a uniform, so our views may be different. Today I will be talking about clause 8. In subclause (1)(a) and (b) we have not made any changes. This part of the clause is fair, and we think a lot of people will like it.

In subclause (2), instead of reflecting the values and preferences of the school community, we think a school should have a uniform that is comfortable and practical. In subclause (3)(d) we have taken out the word ‘significant’. Why should it be a significant group? Why can’t it be any group in the community? Who decides what a significant group is? Everyone should have equal rights. In subclause (4) we have only made one change. We think the education department should not make the decision about the uniform if teachers, students, parents, caregivers, cultural, religious and other groups in the school community cannot agree on all parts of the policy. Our school thinks that the decision should be made by the school’s council. The school council makes many decisions, because it is a decision-making body and represents the school community.

In subclause (5)(a) we have taken out the word ‘and’, and at the end of the sentence put in ‘unless it interferes with the children’s safety’. This means that if the school wishes to have SunSmart hats it will not have to wait a year before wearing them, but if it is a new shirt that does not interfere with students’ wellbeing or safety, that can wait the period of time. In subclause (5)(b) we have just added some words at the end to increase the advertising of the new uniform. We included ‘separate notes’ and ‘assembly’. Why should it just be in the school newsletter? Not all parents may read the school newsletter. Why not in all three?

In subclause (6) we have taken out the word ‘must’ and put in the word ‘should’. Why should children not be able to go to school if they do not immediately agree on the uniform? Our school thinks an exception should be made until the family and school find an agreement. On subclause (7), we think this part of the clause is completely right. Every school must have its uniform policy on its website, or nobody who is thinking of going to a school will know what the uniform is like. We have discussed this clause with all grade 5/6s and this is a statement of what they think.

Mr HALL — Thank you very much, Gabe, for that very comprehensive analysis of what clause 8 is all about.

Miss SHAYNE — I am a grade 6 at Belvedere Park Primary School and I am going to talk about how uniform policy is formed. Our school uniform policy was developed and approved by our school council in 2005. At our school all policies are reviewed every three years by our school council in consultation with our school community. The discussion about what students wear to school was a joint process between students, parents and the school council. A special committee was set up to organise the school uniform policy. There were surveys and questionnaires asking for people’s opinions and ideas on suitable styles and colours. The final recommendations were taken to school council for approval before they were introduced to the school community. Our uniform policy is communicated to students and families in writing when students enrol at our school. It is also included in

the school newsletter approximately twice a year to remind everyone about correct items of clothing, jewellery and hairstyles and colours.

Our school principal often tells us how good we look in our school uniforms when we have whole school assemblies. The classroom teachers regularly discuss the rules of our school uniform policy with their grades. Each classroom teacher has the responsibility of making sure that their students are wearing the correct school uniform every day. The teachers issue out-of-uniform notices for the parents to sign if they have not received a note from the parent explaining why their child is out of uniform. The principal contacts the parent if there is an ongoing problem with the uniform. We have samples of our uniform on display and a uniform shop at our school to make it easier for parents to buy what they need. If someone wanted to suggest a change to the uniform policy, they would have to write a letter to the principal or school council and it would be discussed at a school council meeting.

Miss O'CONNOR — This whole process is relevant to our school at Traralgon as we are currently updating our school uniform. Our current uniform was chosen by school council with help from the local community, parents and students. Since then there have been some minor changes and more options are now accepted. There were too many options for pants, shorts and skirts. It was decided that we should probably make some changes about the bottom half of what we wear. A committee was formed to see if it could agree on what to wear. The local community was consulted via the school newsletter over a three-month period. It invited any interested parents to contribute their thoughts and ideas. The teachers and parents at my school also had an opportunity to add anything they wanted. Some parents and students had concerns about changing the uniform. The concerns were based on the colour and style proposed, but out of 260 families we only received two formal letters of complaint. These letters were presented to school council on Monday.

Overall the school council has the final say about school uniform but the parents, students and teachers have always been given an opportunity to contribute to these issues. Important issues such as these are always put in the school newsletter. Other ways to encourage the wearing of our uniform are via the school website and in our school brochure and they are included in the code of conduct given to all new parents when they enrol at the school. To promote our new uniform I told a teacher to create a display in the front office of our school and he made it happen. Samples of the new uniform have now been set up on a board in the office area. This week a picture of the new uniform was included on the board along with a saying, 'At Stocky we wear our school uniform with pride'. I really believe that is the case.

Our revised uniform policy was presented to school council on Monday. It included the exemptions and enforcement areas. This uniform policy was approved as our new uniform just this week. Our school currently reviews its uniform policy every three years, but I would suggest it should be every year just in case we get some new enrolments into the school. This would cover all students especially those who have special allergy requirements or ethnic or religious beliefs not covered in our current policy. Our principal is the person who reviews this, but I like the idea of the committee made up of parents, teachers and students. It would mean that everyone would have an equal opportunity to express their ideas at the same time.

Mr HALL — Thank you for that very good contribution. The last contribution on this clause will be from Essendon Primary School.

Miss LEE — When our group talked together about the uniform we strongly believed that the uniform at our school should not be changed for most people are happy with it. At our school the uniform has not been changed for a very long time. Students feel happy and comfortable for we can mix and match our school uniform with different styles of black pants, skivvies and jumpers, although 95 per cent of the schools wears the T-shirt and the bomber jacket or jumper. If a school decides to change its uniform the school community should be strongly involved, including teachers, for they know what the children will be doing; principals, because they are the head of the school and would like the uniform to be appropriate and look nice and neat; and parents, for they are the ones who will be making their children wear it. Parents will also be the people who are washing it. They do not want to have to hand wash or dry-clean it for dry-cleaning costs money.

At our school parents are involved in adding new items to the uniform — for example, the sport jacket and the rain jacket that were modelled at assembly. Last of all, students should have the most say in what the uniform looks like for they are the ones who will be wearing it every day of the week. The students need to feel comfortable, and they need to like it. If not, they should write to the principal and give reasons backing up their decision. The uniforms

should have a variety of different fabrics and styles to suit all needs just in case a student has bad asthma or sensitive skin. The school committee should be aware of family budgets and make the price suitable for everyone.

To inform the school community about this uniform change the school should let the parents know as soon as possible so parents can find the time to purchase it. Notices should go around telling parents about this uniform change. The uniform change must not be enforced any earlier than a year after the decision is made. This will give parents and children time to tell the school if they are not happy with it, and the school should not order the new uniforms until they are certain the school community is happy with the decision. The uniform change should not have to apply for grade 6s for it will be their last year, and they will have to spend a lot of money on uniforms next year for high school uniforms. When parents go to purchase the new uniform there should be a display of different uniform you can buy. They should have the price written next to the item so next time you go to buy the uniform you will know how much money to bring. They should also have a list like a book list so you can just tick off the item you want, just in case parents cannot find the time to purchase it or they work. The uniform will be sent to the child's classroom.

In conclusion, if the school is going to change its uniform, we students should be the ones most involved for we are the ones who are wearing it. Last of all, at our school we are very lucky because almost all of the things said in this speech happen there.

Mr ELASMAR — An amendment is to be proposed by Laburnum Primary School to clause 8(4), which provides that 'If the groups listed in section 8(3) are unable to agree on all or part of a uniform policy, the decision will be made by the education department'. The amendment is to delete the whole provision. I now call the speaker for Laburnum Primary School.

Mr FERNANDO — I move:

11. Delete the whole of clause 8(4), which states that the decision will be made by the education department if all parties in a school community are unable to agree on the uniform policy.

We believe if the parties cannot decide, then it should be up to the school council to decide.

Mr ELASMAR — The amendment is to delete the whole subclause. Any speakers?

Ms BOSELEY — I do not think we should delete the whole subclause. I think we should just delete the words 'education department' and put in 'school council'.

Miss HARRY — I think it should be deleted because it should not be made by the education department; it should be made by the school community and council.

Miss RICHARDSON — If you cannot agree I do not think that you should send it to the education department because then you do not really solve the problem. Neither of the groups can really get their way, so I think they should have a vote rather than sending it to someone else to solve.

Miss ROACH — I definitely do not think the decision should be made by the education department because it does not know what all the families in the school want. I think it should be made by a group of people who are close to the school and who know what everybody wants.

Miss SHAW — I do not believe the education department should decide on the uniform. I believe the school community should have a vote or just take their time in deciding it.

Mr ELASMAR — We all understand the amendment is to delete the whole subclause. I put it to the vote. Those in favour raise their hands.

Mr HALL — Perhaps I could just explain it to you before you vote. Most people who have spoken have agreed that it should not be left up to the education department, it should be left up to the school council or it should be silent. Most people have said it should not be the education department. If you agree with that position then you should be voting for the amendment because that deletes the power of the education department to tell schools to wear uniform or not wear uniform. Are there any questions about that? You understand what that means? If you believe that it should not be the education department that tells you what to do, you should vote for the amendment.

Mr ELASMAR — I put it to the vote again. Those in favour raise their hands. That has made a big difference! Against? The vote is carried.

Amendment agreed to; amended clause agreed to.

Mr HALL — I will now explain what we are going to do next. What we have done is we have gone through all of the different clauses of the bill and we have made some decisions along the way. Some of the things we have changed, some of the things we have left as they were. What happens now is that the Parliament has to vote on whether it agrees to what has been left. We have to make up our minds whether we agree essentially with the bill that we have before us with the changes, or we disagree with the bill with the changes. What we are going to do is to have a vote on that. Rather than putting up our hands and saying, ‘Yes, I agree’ or ‘No, I disagree’, we are going to have what is called a division. When we have a division we have to ring the bells and that tells anybody who is not here that they need to hurry up and come back in to cast their vote. We are going to ring the bells for 3 minutes and that will give everybody a chance to come back into the chamber.

A couple of people have asked us what is this funny looking piece of apparatus down here on the front table. It is a 3-minute egg-timer — just a big one. What happens when the bells are rung is the Clerk turns the egg-timer upside down and all the sand falls from the top bowl to the bottom bowl. After 3 minutes the person in the chair will say, ‘Lock the doors’. The attendants at either end of the chamber then lock the doors. If you are not here in time it is too bad, you do not vote and that is not a very good thing if you are an elected member of Parliament. You should be here to vote. We have people here who will count how many people agree with the bill and how many disagree with the bill, and then the vote is recorded. That is then the decision. The Parliament will then pass or fail the bill.

What I am going to do is ask a question. Because we are going to have a division I am going to ask all those people who are voting for the bill to go to the right-hand side of the chamber and sit somewhere over there. If you are in favour of the bill it means you have to go across and squeeze in. If you are disagreeing with the bill then you go and sit somewhere on the left-hand side of the chamber. The question is — and this is the important part, do not move until I say — that the bill, as amended, be agreed to. Ayes to my right, noes to my left. In order to count the number of ayes and the number of noes I ask that those supporting the bill move to the right-hand side and those opposing the bill move to the left-hand side. I ask the Clerk to ring the bells.

Bells rung.

Students divided:

Ayes, 28

Mr Lachlan Aitken

Miss Amanda Beattie

Miss Georgia Boyle

Mr Harley Burgess

Mr Nicholas Carlei

Miss Kate Cohn

Mr Shane Colley

Mr Lochie Cooke

Mr Nic Facey

Mr Ben Fernando

Mr Riley Gilbert

Miss Lydia Hanrahan

Miss Amber Harry

Mr Max Karklins

Miss Catherine Lee

Miss Holly Lessing

Miss Sarah McNamara

Miss Indira Narain

Miss Danielle Neal

Miss Rebecca O'Connor

Mr Ivanko Rakoci

Miss Hayley Roach

Miss Stephanie Ruth

Mr Sam Schneider

Miss Christine Semertzidis

Miss Abbey Shaw

Miss Skye Shayne

Miss Sarah Van Dorssen

Noes, 10

Miss Perrin Boseley

Mr Callum Croker

Mr Harry Heard

Mr Marcus Hocking

Mr Hugh Kroker

Miss Nicola Nelson

Miss Ruby Rees-Wemyss

Miss Anna Richardson

Miss Zara Sengstock

Mr Gabe Steger

Bill, as amended, passed.

Mr HALL — The Legislative Council has now passed the School Uniform Bill 2007 to create an act about school uniforms. What would normally happen is we would send a message to the other chamber, the Legislative Assembly, seeking its agreement to the amendments we have made. A bill does not become an act in Victoria until both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council agree to it. Only then does it become law. The Legislative Assembly has been debating the same bill today, so it will be interesting to see if it also has amendments. We will have a look at that, but we cannot complete the process now, because we will have to come back on another day and look at the amendments that the secondary schools in the Legislative Assembly have made. I want to congratulate everybody for their participation in the debate today. It has been a good experience. How you have done this today is, in a modified way, how Mr Elasmar and I would normally do things when we are debating in Parliament. We have not finished yet. There is one session to go, and Mr Elasmar will introduce that for us.

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Mr ELASMAR — We will now have the adjournment. Towards the end of the day each house adjourns before the next sitting day. Members have the right to bring something to the attention of a minister and have 3 minutes to put their issue. An adjournment matter may be addressed to a minister sitting in the other chamber, the Assembly. Adjournment matters normally have something to do with a member's electorate — for example, I represent Northern Metropolitan Region and I may bring up something to do with my electorate, whether it be roads, schools or any other issue. I raise it with the minister dealing with responses, who takes notes and passes the matter on to the relevant minister. Then the minister will get back to me with an answer as soon as they can. That is what the adjournment is about.

Traralgon (Stockdale Road) Primary School: water-saving initiatives

Miss VAN DORSEN — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and the Minister for Water. Like most places in Australia Traralgon is currently experiencing the effects of the worst drought in more than 100 years. Some may think it is just water, but it is more than that. We use water every day for showering, bathing and drinking. If we did not have water we would not survive. I know that a few areas recycle their water, but I do not want our town to come to that. If we decrease the amount of water we use and if we educate all Australians, there will hopefully be enough water for everyone in the future.

I heard that there was a proposal to take water restrictions back a stage. That is ridiculous. We are in a worse position now than at this time last year, and our future is not looking good. A better idea would be to increase water restrictions to the next level, as it has already been noted that we have had less rain and warmer temperatures in August than the previous averages. This would help to save the precious water supply we currently have so that we do not feel so nervous when summer really hits us this year. There are many ways to save water and in particular in a school. Our school has recently been awarded a grant to upgrade our toilet block. As part of this upgrade we also received money to purchase a new water tank to be located at the end of the building. This will help our school to save water that would normally just go onto the ground and eventually into the drains and then the rivers. This water will not be used to flush out toilets.

We have 375 students at our school, and we generally use a lot of good, clean water in our toilets every day. By using the water that naturally falls onto the existing roofs of our buildings we will greatly reduce our water usage. Our school is also investing in water-saving taps and new washers to save every precious drop. They will be fixed to every tap in the school. There is nothing worse than arriving at school on a Monday to see a dripping tap that someone has left on all weekend. That can unnecessarily waste hundreds of litres. The action I seek is for the minister to support our school's water-saving initiatives by encouraging this type of water saving in all government buildings throughout Australia.

Surfside Primary School: Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden

Mr COOKE — I am in grade 5 at Surfside Primary School in Ocean Grove on the Bellarine Peninsula. We have approximately 300 children at our school, which is not many for a primary school. An exciting thing that is happening is our new Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden. The school put in an application, and around 100 schools entered from Victoria. Our school was lucky enough to be one of the 20 chosen. We have been busy this year, establishing the garden beds and other garden areas, with help from our gardener, staff, parents and all the

kids. The program motto is 'Growing, harvesting, preparing and sharing'. A problem with this project has been that we are on stage 4 water restrictions, but our school has been very good at saving water to put on the garden, and we have also purchased six big water tanks to help us keep the garden very healthy. Our school would like to bring to the attention of Parliament the ongoing concern about the lack of water.

Benalla Primary School: uniform policy

Miss HANRAHAN — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. We have a query regarding the legislation when enforcing the wearing of compulsory school uniforms. We believe the wearing of school uniforms enhances the image of our school, but how do we enforce this? We believe children should not be excluded from their education for not wearing a uniform. Whilst our school will take positive action to enforce the legislation, no students will be excluded from education. A critical point for consideration is the role the principal plays in ensuring that all children are in uniform. At their discretion there are a number of strategies that can be used to ensure that all children are dressed in uniform. Making the wearing of uniforms compulsory brings about the feeling of pride and of belonging to the school, and we ask that the minister supports the enforcement of the uniform legislation by ensuring that there are strategies that can be used by teachers and principals. Although there are many benefits with this legislation, the most important issue is ensuring that no student is ever denied the right to an education in their lifetime. The action I seek is for the minister to support us with the implementation of a uniform policy.

Belvedere Park Primary School: school crossings

Mr RAKOCI — I am in grade 6 at Belvedere Park Primary school. We are concerned about our students' safety when using the three school crossings currently surrounding our school. Some drivers of cars, motorbikes and monkey bikes have been ignoring our school crossing supervisors and driving through the crossings while the students are walking across. Our school has also had a problem with monkey bikes and motorbikes being driven on the footpaths and through the school grounds during school hours. The students, parents and teachers are concerned that someone could be hurt by these drivers. It is also frustrating for the crossing supervisors when some drivers ignore them and they cannot be stopped. There have also been some people parking in the wrong places and interfering with the school crossings. Our school has notified the police on many occasions. Recently a community meeting was held to address the problem of illegal motorbike riding a member of our school council and PFA attended. A letter was written to the local council asking for its help.

We would like our local council to send an officer to give fines to these people who are parking and driving in the wrong place. We think a police car should drive by the school regularly to catch these illegal drivers, because they are putting our students at risk. We want our students to be safe from these drivers when they are crossing the road and walking on the footpath. On occasions in the past VicRoads has issued a patrol car to watch over the crossing on the main road outside our school. It helped slow these drivers down, but the problem keeps coming up once the patrol care has finished its cycle at our school. This is why we think we should have a police officer or someone from the local council to patrol the area and stop these reckless drivers, monkey bike riders and motorcyclists from breaking the law and possibly injuring our students.

St Kilda Park Primary School: car park

Mr KROKER — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. The car park our school uses is managed by Parks Victoria. Last year meters were installed, preventing all staff, parents and volunteers having access to long-term free parking. Parks Victoria has granted us 13 spaces at a cost of \$166 per permit, and 13, 3-hour permits. However, this is only a fraction of the space we need in order for our school to function efficiently and safely. The impact on the safety of the students is considerable. Staff and visitors have been forced to park in the school grounds. Cars are constantly driving in and out, and parking over playing space, notably the only basketball court we have. This is particularly dangerous at recess and lunchtime. It also limits the space we have available for sport and PE lessons. Children's safety is at risk, as they have to negotiate streams of cars in a narrow laneway in order to reach the school gates. Cars are continually reversing and moving forward; everyone has to be very careful to prevent an accident. The congestion in the laneway and schoolyard is a significant problem for emergency vehicle access: it prevents a quick and easy access to the school building, and the fire hydrant is often inaccessible. The action I seek is for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change to investigate and support our claim for this dangerous situation to be remedied.

Schools: homework

Miss RUTH — I raise a matter for the Minister for Education. On behalf of Victorian students I express my belief that students at government primary schools are getting too much homework. I am not suggesting that we abolish homework because it does have many benefits. Homework teaches you to be well prepared, it helps you to learn and gain strength in areas where you may be struggling, it teaches you how to manage your time well and be organised, and it prepares you for secondary school and university. Sometimes homework allows you to revise what you have done during the day to help you have a better understanding, and it helps you to develop some independence rather than relying on the teacher. There are many reasons to decrease the amount of homework given. Many children have important after-school commitments such as sport and instrumental music lessons. Some people find it difficult to learn without the teacher's help and do not benefit when they do not understand the homework. Children are encouraged to exercise, but with the amount of homework most people are not getting any exercise or time to play outside. It also has effects on people's social life, and students are not spending enough time out of school with their friends. If students are not coping with the amount of homework it can cause stress and arguments in the home. The action I seek is for the minister to implement a policy that restricts the amount of homework given to primary school-aged students.

Essendon Primary School: funding

Mr CARLEI — I am in grade 6. We ask the Minister for Education for extra funding for our school. Essendon Primary School is one of the oldest schools in Melbourne, and the things I will mention are just some of the issues we think need to be attended to. The electrical system is out of date by our current standards. Some of the classrooms still have the old platforms inside, which students and teachers trip over. We have very small and very old portables for music and art. Our oval was recently extended, and because of the drought we decided to have it covered with synthetic grass. However, because of the lack of funding we could only afford to do half of the oval. This is a big safety hazard, because the half that is not covered is mainly dirt with patches of grass around: when wet it is very muddy, and when it is sunny it cracks.

Students at our school are becoming more environmental by riding their bikes, but the bike rack is too small and overcrowded, and because there is no cover the bikes get wet. We do not have a specialist sports teacher, and with all the media talk about children being too obese, a structured sports program may help. Some classrooms do not have air conditioning, and they can be quite hot in the summer. Some of our other classrooms have paint peeling off the walls. People may think if we ask money other schools should too. Everyone has the right to ask, but our school has been here for over 150 years and desperately needs to be renovated to improve student learning. We like our school, but we would like it even more if it was up to date with current standards. We encourage ministers to come to the school and see what we have to show them.

Schools: funding

Miss NELSON — I am from Spensley Street Primary School and I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. We understand that a new initiative is being proposed by the Victorian government that will change year level funding. This policy is not increasing funding; it is taking funds from critical starting years and instead directing the money at the middle years. We believe all year levels are equally important and therefore should all be funded equally. If the Victorian government wanted to give more money to years 5 to 8, then instead of taking from other areas or years they should increase funding for education entirely. We believe this is necessary anyway, because the latest national report on schooling shows Victorian primary school students receive \$8594 a year in recurrent government spending compared to \$9944 per student in New South Wales and \$10 840 in Western Australia. The action I seek is for the minister to raise the amount of funding that goes to education to bring it to the same level as the other states in Australia. Then, if still required, it should equalise and raise funds for all year levels in schools in Victoria.

Mr ELASMAR — If you remember in the beginning of the adjournment, I explained that there will be a minister sitting there taking notes. Mr Hall was doing that, and he is going to speak about that.

Mr HALL — Thank you very much, Mr Elasmarr. I have to pretend that I am a minister and I am going to respond to all of those matters that people brought up on the adjournment. What happens is that the minister writes down the names of those people who have raised a matter and promises to refer it on to the respective minister.

First we had Sarah from Traralgon (Stockdale Road) Primary School raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change. Sarah outlined all the water-saving initiatives that are happening at her school — which sound terrific, Sarah — and sought some assistance from the minister to support the school in furthering those water-saving initiatives. What Mr Elasmarr and I will do is refer that particular matter to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, and we will get you a response in due course.

Next we had Lochie from Surfside Primary School. Lochie told us all about some of the garden initiatives that are happening at Surfside Primary School. They sound like excellent initiatives, Lochie. Congratulations to you and to all the students at your school. But you have had some problems with supplying enough water to make sure that those gardens stay alive and grow the things that you would want them to grow. Again, I think it was a request to the Minister for Environment and Climate Change to see what he can do to assist the school in increasing water availability to help you with that endeavour. We will pass that request on to the minister for you, and hopefully we will get some assistance.

Lydia raised an issue on behalf of Benalla Primary School regarding the possibility that if you were not wearing school uniform you could be excluded from coming to school. I just want to check with the clerks: did we pass an amendment to delete that suspension provision? I am going to make the clerks to do a little bit of work here. When we were going through the bill we changed one aspect of it, didn't we? I am advised it was only detention. So what you have identified there, Lydia, is a further issue that you think needs to be addressed in the legislation. What we will have to do is refer it back to the Minister for Education, ask her to have a look at that particular provision again and see if we need to call you all back to the Legislative Council chamber to change it again. How would that be to come back for another day if the minister agrees to it? Thanks for that, Lydia. We will see what we can do with the Minister for Education.

Ivanko told us about the problems at the school pedestrian crossings at Belvedere Park Primary School and the fact that people are parking too close to the school crossings and they are ignoring the signs, speeding and sometimes going through the school crossings. That is a serious problem; we acknowledge that. We will ask perhaps the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Public Transport to have a look at that problem for your school and see if they can do as they requested — that is, either put more police in control there, so that they patrol the crossing a bit more, or perhaps we need a few more traffic inspectors from the local council to prosecute those who park in the wrong spots. We will take that matter up for you and see if we can get some improvements for your school.

Next we had Hugh from St Kilda Park Primary School. Hugh raised a matter for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change outlining some of the parking problems at his school, particularly for staff and visitors to the school and the fact that Parks Victoria has failed to allocate a sufficient number of parking spaces for parents and teachers at the school. I think it is appalling that some of your teachers have to park on the school site and therefore, I suppose, take up valuable playing area for students at your school. Because the Minister for Environment and Climate Change is responsible for Parks Victoria, we will take it up with him, won't we, Mr Elasmarr, and see if we cannot come to some arrangement to increase the amount of parking for staff and visitors at your school. Thanks for raising that, Hugh.

Next we had Stephanie Ruth from Laburnum Primary School. Stephanie raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education about too much homework. Do you all agree that you get too much homework? A few nods; 'Sometimes', say some people. Stephanie has asked the minister to put in place some practices to reduce the amount of homework that students are required to undertake. We will certainly raise that with the Minister for Education. I cannot promise you that she will agree to it but we will see how we go. Thank you for raising that with us.

Nicholas Carlei from Essendon Primary School told us about some of the funding problems in that school. He gave us a big, long list. We hope the Minister for Education has lots of money in her pocket because there are some real problems that you have got at Essendon, as I understand it from what you said. Again, we will pass that request on to the Minister for Education to see if we cannot get some more money for the work that you need at your primary school. We will do our best for you.

Finally, Nicola Nelson from Spensley Street Primary School also raised a matter for the Minister for Education. It was regarding school funding and concerned both the distribution of school funding between year levels and the fact that Victoria receives a lot less student funding per head than other schools in New South Wales in particular.

That is a real problem. I know some schools find that very difficult because they do not have enough money to go around. Nicola, we will do what we can. We will raise that for the attention of the Minister for Education and we will see if we can get some more funding for Spensley Street Primary School.

There we go. There were eight adjournment items that the minister had to deal with tonight. Mr Elasmarr and I will take them up with the Minister for Education and will attempt to furnish all of your schools with a reply once we get them back from the various ministers. Thank you very much for your contributions on the adjournment debate. We will now adjourn.

Committee adjourned.