

**CATHOLIC EDUCATION COMMISSION
OF VICTORIA LIMITED**

SUBMISSION TO THE

**INQUIRY INTO DRESS CODES
AND SCHOOL UNIFORMS IN
VICTORIAN SCHOOLS**

**BY THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

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INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) has overall responsibility for the education of more than 180,000 students within Victoria. These students attend 93 Catholic secondary schools and 382 Catholic primary schools as well as 7 special schools. The schools employ about 13,900 teachers and are supported by the Catholic Education Offices of the four Dioceses: Melbourne, Ballarat, Sandhurst and Sale. The CECV speaks on behalf of the Victorian Catholic schools sector.

The CECV welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry.

SUBMISSION

The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd (CECV) does not mandate requirements with regard to dress codes and school uniforms for students. Such issues are matters to be determined by local school authorities within each of the four dioceses.

In the Archdiocese of Melbourne, advice to schools on dress codes and school uniform matters are based on the directions of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic.) which allows for employers/schools to set reasonable standards of dress and appearance for students, within the parameters of community consultation and expectation.

The Diocese of Ballarat is also of the view that this area falls within the responsibility of the individual school and that the right for schools to mandate a uniform, and implement procedures to ensure it is worn appropriately, must be retained. Schools can be trusted to identify and implement a uniform policy that suits their culture/community. The decision as to if/how a uniform may be varied under a particular circumstance, is to be made at the school level.

The Diocese of Sandhurst provides the following comments in addressing the terms of reference of the Inquiry:

(a) *The benefits and costs of mandatory school uniforms*

Benefits

- Can help develop a sense of community and school identity.
- Reduces the likelihood of clothing cliques, i.e. pressure to wear trendy (and expensive) labelled clothing.
- Assists in the supervision of students particularly in the playground and on excursions.
- Ensures students are dressed appropriately for schools e.g. physical education

Costs

- School uniforms can be expensive.
- If schools choose to sell their uniform only via the school uniform shop, it can lead to accessibility problems for parents.

Research

- Some research suggests uniforms improve behaviour, other research suggests otherwise. (See <http://danenet.wicip.org/ncs/forumuniformseval.htm>).
- (b) *The views of school communities about dress codes and school uniforms*
- Mandatory school uniform policies enjoy wide spread support within the diocese.
- (c) *The most cost efficient and practical uniform procurement arrangements*
- Most schools within the diocese either sell their uniforms exclusively via the school or have arrangements with local supplies to stock their uniforms.
 - Both arrangements assist the local economy and is one way to keep local communities viable.
- (d) *Matters which need to be considered to ensure dress codes and uniform policies are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation and health promotion policies*
- The wearing of culturally important garments has potential to cause some problems. The experience is that schools can usually come to a compromise with the students and their parents. However, clear guidance on this issue would be appreciated by schools.
- (e) *Appropriate enforcement and sanctions*
- Students not wearing correct school uniform are required to provide a note of explanation.
 - It is quite common for students in term 1 & 4 who are not wearing a hat to have their play time restricted to shaded areas only as part of the Sun Smart policy.
 - In specific instances, students may be prevented from participating in certain activities due to health and safety considerations; e.g. incorrect footwear may pose a danger in some classes.
 - Students should not be denied educational opportunities because they are not wearing correct school uniform, unless there is a health and safety consideration.
 - Any sanctions should be consistent with and linked to the school's student code of conduct policy.
- (f) *Appropriate exemption criteria and processes*
- See above
- (g) *National and International trends*
- It would appear that countries and/or localities with gang related cultures are moving towards mandatory school uniforms to reduce the problems associated with the wearing of gang clothing.
 - A brief overview of trends can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_uniform.