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School Uniform Inquiry Submission 96

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Enquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniform in Victorian Schools

We are personally in favour of school uniform as a leveller across social and cultural divides. It reduces the competition amongst students for the latest and best fashions.

It should be **affordable**, **serviceable**, suitable for the school environment and appropriate for hands on courses such as VET subjects. The students should have input into selection of uniform as they are the ones who will wear it. Parents also need to have input as they will be paying for it and cleaning and maintaining it.

What it must **not** be is a controlling vehicle or discipline issue. This is the situation at our son's school (**Whittlesea Secondary College**.) At our school students are punished far more harshly for breaches of Uniform rules than for other more serious behavioural misdemeanours. Students wearing the wrong shoes are excluded from classes and even sent home. This is power gone crazy.

Parents of teenagers have plenty of issues that cause conflict with their children and they do not need the added hassle of fights over uniform. More emphasis should be placed on educational outcomes in school than on appearance or adherence to over zealous uniform requirements. The staff at our school have become uniform police rather than educators. What a waste of their skills!

Our school has introduced a new Uniform which included an expensive blazer. (\$170) This was approved by the school council without adequate consultation with the parent and student body. Kerry was involved with the parent forums to discuss the new uniform. She attended almost every meeting along with one or two other parents. The group never agreed to a compulsory blazer, it was always put up as an optional item. The meetings of one to three people were not representative and very little effort was put into attracting further parent input.

Recently a sports tracksuit was introduced and while it was not compulsory, it was **required** if any student wished to represent the school in sport. This has resulted in many students not participating in school teams, particularly in the senior years where parents feel they will not get the use from a tracksuit before their child completes their schooling. Surely participation is more important than appearances. Consequently there is much unhappiness about aspects of the new Uniform and it is detracting from the educational issues in the school.

The issue of 'smartening up' the students has been the justification for the changes to the college uniform. We feel the issue is deeper than this and stems from a lack of student pride in the school and connectedness to the school. This will not be improved by changing the uniform. We have to give the students something they can be proud of and part of. We have to give students and parents a meaningful say in the way their school is run. Uniform is one small part of schooling and should not dominate the time and effort of educators, students and parents. (Or Parliamentary Committees!)

Uniform policy at school should be clearly outlined, with reference to the philosophical justification for its existence. (At our school it is merely a set of draconian rules and consequences.) Input should be gathered from the school community to discuss questions such as:

- What is the purpose of school uniform? How important is it to our school?
- Do we want a school uniform? Why or why not?
- If yes, how will the uniform be determined? What is practicable for our school?
- Do we want enforcement of uniform requirements? Consequences for non-compliance?
- How can costs be minimised?
- How often will the policy be reviewed? ...And so on...

Thank you and good luck.
Kerry Clarke & Larry Challis