

Croydon Community School
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Re: Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms

Our school does not have a uniform. Six years ago we developed a dress code to better manage our responsibilities for OHS and student safety, but apart from a few specific points there are no restrictions on what students choose to wear to school each day. The main points of our dress code are:

- Thongs are not permitted at school
- Singlets cannot be worn in terms 1 and 4
- Emblems on clothing cannot promote illegal or immoral goods or acts, including alcohol for under 18's
- Jewellery may have to be removed for some activities, or if it is thought to be a danger to others (eg spiked rings, wrist bands, etc).
- Solid shoes must be worn in Technology (Wood & Food)

Our underlying philosophy is that wearing a uniform does not correlate to student learning outcomes. Many of the students who enrol with us are from low socio-economic backgrounds and purchasing uniforms is prohibitive. Compulsory uniform has also excluded some of our students from schooling in the past because when uniform is mandatory they simply choose to not attend school. For example, students who wish to express their individuality through their choice of clothing will often not comply with school requirements. We see this in the shape of 'goth' or 'emo' clothing, as well as lesbian and homosexual students, but also in more common youth cultures such as skaters.

There are, however, a growing number of students who are requesting uniform items that are non-compulsory in nature. The reason expressed most commonly is that they find deciding what to wear too onerous on a daily basis. We have worked with students to design a number of t-shirts that promote our school-based programs (work education, martial arts therapy) and these can be worn whenever students choose.

One disadvantage we find with not having a uniform is that every young person who 'hangs out' in our local area during the school day is assumed to be a student at our school. This has manifested itself in incidents of poor behaviour automatically being attributed to students from our school, whether or not they are. This culminates in negative feelings towards the school by local traders and residents, something we constantly battle to negate.

Our lack of uniform is often looked upon favourably by students and parents at the time of enrolment. I do not, however, believe that it is a 'selling point' for most. The decision to enrol at Croydon Community School is based more strongly on our alternative curriculum, remedial literacy & numeracy, and strong welfare base rather than on uniform.

Bullying is not an issue at our school as a general rule. In my six years at the school I have not heard of any students being bullied or picked on for their choice of clothes. This includes some kids who wear pretty individualised clothing and accessories at different times.

Students do not appear to be pressured into wearing expensive clothing either. Some of our students wear the same clothes every day, every week and the school provides donated clothing items on a regular basis to make sure that students can rotate clothing for washing purposes and in response to weather conditions. We also purchase required specialist clothing for students undertaking work experience when they are unable to afford these.

We have very few sanctions for students who do not comply to our dress code.

- Where safety is concerned students are excluded from the activity until they are appropriately dressed. We move students to other classes so that they continue to participate in the educational programs at the school.
- If students are wearing inappropriate logos on their clothing we ask that it is not visible, either by wearing a jumper over the top, turning the item inside-out, or by us 'trading' their top for one of ours for the day.
- If students persist in wearing unsafe or inappropriate items we work with families, offering to provide appropriate items if required. If this does not solve the situation we have excluded students from school until an appropriate choice is made. This is usually for a very short time only as students have always made good choices when faced with this option.

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