



"Ange Kenos"

**Niddrie VIC**

26/05/2007 09:05 AM

To <etc@parliament.vic.gov.au>

cc

bcc

Subject uniform submission

Chairman and Members  
Education and Training Committee  
Parliament of Victoria

If an unemployed teacher can pass comment on your Inquiry regarding school uniforms, then I offer the following.

I think of the issue from the point of view of students, parents, teachers and others within the community as each of these plays a role.

For the students the idea of a compulsory uniform can be rather boring and dull as some clearly wish to dress up and show off, wear jewelry and show their "individuality". Others find comfort in being the same as their peers and believe that it allows them to fit in more easily, rather than standing out.

Certainly from past experience I have learned that if the uniform is smart rather than dull and drab or strikingly off, as in everything, except the shoes being a rather strong purple, then students are far more likely to wear it positively rather than coercively.

Years ago, I was year 11 Coordinator at Kurunjang Secondary College. The students wanted a new school uniform and the school determined to allow them to design what they wanted within a few guidelines. The result, without going through everything in between, was a range of choices which the students had designed, the school approved and which they wore readily.

From the point of view of parents, issues basically are those of 'my child is an individual', 'the uniforms are boring', or 'the uniforms are expensive'. I have heard these so many times over the years. But a uniform does not prevent a child from expressing their individuality, rather they allow all children to be seen without the veil of class and privilege that some will have over others.

An individual can still be seen through sport, art, music, scholastic endeavours, community activities/ extra curricular roles...

Where uniforms are boring and dull, as so many are, they should be redesigned as occurred with Kurunjang SC those years ago.

But what upsets me the most is when the "expense" issue is raised. In one school a parent spoke very strongly against even a school cardigan or jumper because she could not afford replacing them when her daughter would leave it behind in the school ground every week.

The fact that she did not leave other clothing behind every week, or her own role in teaching her daughter some responsibility was never within her realm of consideration.

Yet the truth is that while a uniform is more expensive in the beginning in the end it becomes very economical. Such as the school blazer which I wore for four years. Or the jumper which lasted me for five years, even after a racist knifed it in the shed during sport one day.

Second hand uniforms are often available, but if it looks smart then the students will wear it.

But all that stated, guarding against rip offs is essential. Some suppliers are simply too expensive due to limited competition. Schools need support and advice about the alternatives, and this includes the more simple things such as plain shirts and trousers for male students which should be purchasable anywhere.

Ideally they should only be made in Australia as this ensures not only quality, as compared to the rubbish from certain countries overseas, but also – we hope – more ready availability.

Ofcourse today we also have the issues of students from other cultures, some of which could even be alternative Christian cultures. A uniform is to be worn by all students of the school and if a student or a family objects then the school should have the right to require their transfer, elsewhere.

But at the same time if all that the student seeks is to wear a plain Cross on the outside of their uniform then no school should object. If they wish to wear a turban or a head scarf (as distinct from a face covering hajib or similar garment) then unlike France we should allow this personal expression of their faith.

Equal opportunity must be respected for staff and students alike within a school.

Ofcourse I have taught at schools where kids and their families were so poor that their clothing had holes. Some sort of relief support should be available here beyond the limitations of the EMA programme.

As a parent and as a teacher, as a member of the community and as a past student I am a firm believer in the benefits of school uniforms. But the selection of a uniform or significant change must always involve the school, community and not, as with one western suburbs government secondary college, where the Deputy Principal herself determined what the new uniform would be and was allowed by the principal to do as she alone wished.

Mr. Ange Kenos

**Niddrie VIC**

26 May 2007