



## School Uniform Inquiry Submission 95

To: Education and Training Committee

Re: Enquiry Into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Mr J A Marsh

**Baranduda VIC**

8<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Email: greencomputing@gmail.com

*My name is Mr Tony Marsh and I would like to address the following terms of the enquiry:*

- Codes and uniform policies are consistent with anti discrimination legislation and health promotion policies
- Appropriate enforcement and sanctions

*My submission is in relation to what I believe to be inappropriate sanctions applied for trivial infractions of uniform regulations – sanctions that deny students the right to participate in classes critical to their successful completion of Year 12 studies. Further to this I have outlined an account of what transpired at the start of this year.*

*I am the father of Geordie Marsh who is a VCE student at Wodonga Senior Secondary college and has been since Year 7 when it was Wodonga High school. My two daughters also were educated at this school and have since completed degrees in Melbourne. In fact our association with the school goes back to 1980 when my wife Jenny Marsh was a teacher and remained so for many years and continues to teach in the reorganized school system in Wodonga. I also am a teacher in adult education and tafe with previous secondary school teaching experience in Wodonga.*

*The nature of our concerns are in relation to what we believe to be an inappropriate implementation by Wodonga Senior Secondary College of their uniform policy and the negative impacts this has had on our son's VCE learning environment.*

*My son attended school on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> Jan and was informed that his footwear was outside school uniform policy – these are the same shoes he wore to school last year. At some stage last year the school issued a change of policy indicating that black shoes must be worn. The shoes my son wears to school were black and grey. At no stage during last year including the headstart program for emergent VCE students was it indicated to my son that his footwear was out of uniform despite the school stating in school newsletter of the 10<sup>th</sup> November 2006*

*"All students are expected to attend Headstart and to be dressed in full school uniform, including black shoes."*

*Geordie attended all of the headstart program and prior to Wed 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2007 the prospect that Geordie's footwear might be outside school uniform policy guidelines had never occurred to either of his parents nor at any stage had this information been communicated to us by the school.*

*On Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February my son attended school with a note from his mother requesting the school ring either of the phone numbers supplied on the note to contact her to discuss the problem.*

*My son presented the note to the deputy principal at school who read the note, did not act on the notes request or Geordie's request to contact his parents and decided to remove Geordie from his first year 12 photography class for the year and a another year 11 class – he was prevented from attending his VCE classes and required to spend 4 hours under*

*supervision. Despite the request in the note from his mother no attempt to contact the parents was made. When Geordie arrived home and informed his parents what had transpired at school Jenny immediately rang the school and spoke to another Deputy Principal, expressed her dismay and incredulity that Geordie had been forcibly removed from the learning environment.*

*Our son felt intimidated and bullied. He received an angry response when he asked the staff involved to contact his parents to discuss the issue with his shoes as was requested in the note he took to school.*

*I rang the school on Friday, spoke to a Deputy Principal and also expressed my disbelief with what had transpired on Thursday and requested a meeting with the principal that day. At 3pm I was greeted by two Deputy Principals and later on we were also joined by another DP.*

*At this meeting I made the following points*

- *I acknowledge that school council has a uniform policy in place that all students must adhere to*
- *Pointed to the fact that the advice to parents had been to look in the students diary or the school website for details of the new uniform policy which is replicated below in the section WSSC 725 Uniform Policy (with my highlighting).*
- *Asked why there was no attempt made to contact the parents before removing Geordie from his learning environment to which the reply was that the AP was too busy*
- *Indicated the stipulation in the Student Discipline Procedures 1994 which states that*
- *“the statewide requirements in relation to withdrawal from class state that care should be taken to ensure that a student’s studies are not adversely affected. Any infringement of a dress code is not usually linked with interference to the rights of other students or the capacity of a teacher to teach a class, and therefore withdrawal from classroom instruction (or other school activities) will not normally apply”*
- *“When a student’s behaviour significantly interferes with the rights of other students to learn or the capacity of a teacher to teach a class, that student may be temporarily isolated from regular classroom activities or, in more severe cases, required to leave the classroom for a specified period of time. . Where appropriate, parents should be informed of such withdrawals.”*

*“When a student violates rules under the school’s code of conduct, teachers should invoke consequences that are consistent with the rules. Rules must be clearly explained so that students understand why they have been punished. The student should understand the connection between the behaviour and the consequence.*

*Consequences should be graded in severity, with emphasis on students being accountable and learning to take responsibility for their behaviour. These disciplinary measures should be part of the teacher’s classroom management plan and consistent with the whole school’s approach to the implementation of the code of conduct. Care should be taken to ensure that the student’s studies are not adversely affected by such disciplinary measures.”*

- Indicated that I failed to see how the wrong color shoes significantly interfered with the rights of other students to learn or the capacity of the teacher to teach the class
- Indicated that being too busy was not in my opinion a sufficient reason to avoid communicating with parents over an issue of removal of a student from their learning environment
- Suggested that had either a note sent home with Geordie on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> Jan or a phone call been made to either parent that the issue could have been dealt with without the need to remove Geordie from his Year 12 class and the subsequent trauma that has resulted could have been easily avoided
- Indicated that on a number of issues I found the school's management of the issue to be totally inappropriate
- Requested that the school acknowledge that the matter was handled inappropriately and that we would like an apology .
- The DPs at the meeting would not acknowledge that the situation was managed inappropriately

Consequently I indicated that I wished to take the matter further. A meeting with the principal was then requested and arranged at short notice. I met with the principal at about 3-25pm and basically reiterated the same points that I had made in the meeting with the DPs but also stated that

- That a simple hand written note that Geordie took home on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> indicating the matter was urgent was all that was required
- I considered the failure of the DP to communicate with parents over this matter prior to Geordie being removed from class was totally unacceptable
- My confidence in the capacity of the school to respect the rights of students to have access to the educational environment was shaken and that their attitude to removal of students from class for minor breaches of uniform policy was cavalier and possibly in breach of DOE guidelines
- Had we been informed prior to Wed 31<sup>st</sup> Jan that Geordie's shoes were not part of the school uniform we would have acted during the summer holidays to redress the situation
- Had Geordie been informed on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> Jan that he would be excluded from class the next day without a change of color of footwear we would have acted as soon as possible to purchase new shoes

Again I requested an acknowledgement from the school that the matter had been dealt with inappropriately and again the request was refused.

In summary our position on this matter is that

- The arbitrary removal of students from their learning environment for indeterminate periods of time for trivial infractions of uniform regulations is unacceptable and should not be sanctioned by the DOE.
- In the case of our son the school has implemented the uniform policy in an intimidatory and bullying manner without due regard to the rights of students to have access to the learning environment
- We were not adequately informed that our son's footwear was in breach of the school's uniform regulations or given adequate notice or time to comply with these regulations
- That the diabolical penalties that would ensue the next day with perceived non compliance of this school's uniform policy were not explicitly communicated to us on Wed 31<sup>st</sup> January
- We do not feel that the school has adequately addressed this issue and we feel aggrieved that they have not acknowledged the inappropriateness of their response.

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- *In the context of Victorian government stated intention of retaining 90% of 15-19 year olds to Year 12 level by 2010, the school's draconian approach to this matter appears to be totally inconsistent with the fulfillment of that policy*

*As a result of the response I received from the school I submitted a complaint to the regional stakeholders liaison officer and eventually received a reply that I was very disappointed with in that it was totally dismissive and lacked any acknowledgement of the impact this had on my son.*

## **WSSC 725 Uniform Policy**

Students not wearing uniform must report to their Year Level Coordinator or an Assistant Principal before the commencement of the school day where they will be given a change of clothes. Should they refuse they will be sent home to change. Failure to do so will result in suspension. If all uniform stocks have been exhausted, the student may undertake supervised class work in the administration area.

In recognition of the change for students in their final year of schooling exemption is given to Year 12 students with regard to colour, which should be discreet

Students out of uniform may be:

- Required to change into uniform the school can provide
- Sent home to change - if parents can be contacted.
- Given school detention if they are repeat offenders.

