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Newport VIC

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

cc

bcc

Subject attention Ms Karen Ellingford

3rd. June 2007

To the Education and Training Committee

I am including with this submission, the letter that I sent to the school that my son is currently attending, Williamstown High School, in response to their notification of a new school uniform policy recently. The policy was passed, without any public consultation in its formation. The letter I sent was to voice my displeasure at changes to the current uniform policy; changes that I feel are being imposed upon the school community and which I feel will affect a certain section negatively.

I am fully supportive of the wearing of school uniforms. My problem lies in the point that the school councils should be responsible in making them comfortable, hard wearing and most of all, affordable. At times, I feel that the emphasis is all about the appearance rather than the functionality, and damn the expense!

In my experience, parents and children should not have to do battle each day over this issue. If children are unhappy with what they have to wear, then life can become most intolerable for all concerned.

I am a sole parent, existing on a limited budget, and I am extremely interested in keeping the uniform policies functional and reasonably priced. I think it is a concern that my child may be disciplined or even discriminated against because of my insufficient finances or the desire to allow him to wear school clothing that he finds comfortable each day.

I would be very appreciative if your committee could make sure that these concerns I have voiced in this letter are considered in your report.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Susanne McCracken

Newport VIC

23rd. November 2006

To the School Council

I am writing to add my opinion to the feedback that you are seeking regarding the uniform policy and its enforcement.

I wish to state that I find it a very unfair policy and I am hoping that the Council will readjust it accordingly.

I do not believe that Dobson's are the cheapest alternative as a supplier. I am fully aware that the uniform for the school was supplied by Double C Jeanery a few years back, and the difference in the cost of uniform items from that establishment, and Dobson's is rather substantial.

I would also like to take this opportunity to point out, as a person who has purchased uniform items from both establishments, that the quality of the material used in the uniforms supplied by Dobson's is greatly inferior than the items that were available from Double C. My eldest child wore several items of clothing that I bought at Double C Jeanery, through all his years at Williamstown High, and they looked as good on his last day at school as the day that I purchased them six years before. Unfortunately, I will never be able to boast of a similar occurrence with the uniform that my child attending your school this year is currently wearing. The tops that I purchased at the beginning of the year are in such a terrible state that I will be obliged to replace them before next year. This was not in my budget, I can assure you, and makes me extremely unhappy. I have spoken to other parents who have had the same experience with inferior quality and are unhappy about this as well.

I also object to the wearing of a blazer as part of the school uniform. This might be appropriate attire for an adult in a working environment but I can assure you that children do not want to wear such restrictive clothing. Even adults will discard a suit jacket at the first convenient moment. Students have a whole range of different activities that they must perform in the school week that do not make the wearing of a blazer a comfortable or suitable thing to have to wear. The jumper is another item that I have a problem with. My child has never worn a jumper, as it is an article of clothing that he finds extremely uncomfortable to wear. He finds them too warm and uncomfortable.

Another problem I have with both items is the cost. I am a sole parent and I am working with a very restricted budget. I thought it was wonderful that my son could wear the spray jacket at school. He liked it and he found it extremely comfortable. I liked the fact that it was so versatile. My son rides to school in all types of weather and the jacket is great for that, and then he could wear it all day if needed. I did not have to buy several items of clothing. The cost of the jumpers and the cost of the blazers are very high for people on low incomes. If he needs to wear one or the other at school for warmth on cooler days, I still need to buy him a jacket to wear for sport and getting to and from school. How is that cost effective for us? Also \$160 for a blazer is not 'cheap' to many, many families, especially when our children grow out of clothes quicker than we can save to buy them sometimes. A blazer is not an article of clothing that suits buying it several sizes larger to get extra wear from it as can be done with the spray jacket.

I hope that in certain circumstances that the policy of seasonal uniform is going to be flexible. I think that the argument for this is obvious from the weather that we have just endured in the past week alone. Melbourne at its best often gives us quite extremes of temperatures at times that are totally unexpected. I think that it is only fair on such days that there is an option to dress appropriately without fear of repercussions.

These are my feelings about the changes that are being introduced. I would like to add that I have spoken to many other parents and all feel very similar sentiments about the changes that have been put forward. We feel that this is happening without proper consultation with the entire school community. I really think that this is relative to the results that the school has achieved in the Parent Opinion Survey. If you are serious about working better as a school and meeting the expectations of the school community, then the first step is to address the dissatisfaction that is being felt by a large portion of your school community about this issue. I think you need to send out a flyer to ALL families seeking feedback as soon as possible.

And lastly, I would like to state that I feel that the school is being highly discriminatory to a section of the school community.

Thank you for listening to my concerns, and I hope that common sense prevails, and a more consultative approach is initiated with this matter.

Yours sincerely

Susanne McCracken

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