

Ms Karen Ellingford  
Executive Officer  
Education and Training Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE 3002

August 21 2007

Dear Ms Ellingford

I wish to make a submission to the Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools.

My submission specifically relates to the TOR items a, b and d namely the

- the benefits and costs of mandatory school uniforms;
- the views of school communities about dress codes and school uniforms;
- matters which need to be considered to ensure dress codes and uniform policies are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation and health promotion policies;

I support the mandating of the wearing of school uniforms at school but I would like the Committee to make a recommendation that school uniforms be sun smart, and this includes the mandating that appropriate sun smart hats are worn.

### **Recommendation 1**

**I recommend that the committee recommends that all State schools mandate the provision and wearing of suitable sun smart hats by all students and that uniforms be made sun smart.**

I believe that our children should be kept safe from sun damage while at school. Clearly, having sun smart uniforms would be wise, but the most important aspect in my opinion is the mandating of the wearing of suitable sun hats as part of all school uniforms.

Happily, many State primary schools are now sun smart, but it is very concerning there are no sun smart secondary schools in Victoria<sup>1</sup>. It is concerning that the State schools have universally failed to embrace the wearing of sun smart hats even when their students come from sun smart primary schools. The main argument against the mandating of sun hats appears to be that it is 'difficult' to make young adults wear hats. These arguments are very unconvincing to me, especially when schools are quite capable of enforcing other aspects of uniform wearing, such as the wearing of those ugly, uncomfortable, heavy, black leather school shoes that my children have to wear!

In my immediate family skin cancer is already seriously threatening the life of one sibling and several others have had pre-cancerous growths removed, yet I am unable to adequately protect my children from sun damage while they attend local State secondary colleges because the secondary school does mandate the wearing of appropriate sun hats

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<sup>1</sup> According to my own research and checking with Cancer Council of Victoria.

(until this year, they did not even provide a suitable sun hat and students were prohibited from wearing their own sun hats). However, if they attended a private secondary school, I would be much more likely to encounter compulsory hat wearing.

I support the wearing of school uniforms because they save money and time and they also contribute to greater peace and harmony, but the wearing of uniforms needs to be more strictly enforced.

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Wearing school uniform is compulsory and rigorously enforced**

In my opinion, having a mandated school uniform has the following benefits:

- Saves money (as there is less pressure on families to buy the latest fashions)
- Peace and harmony as arguments about what is permissible to wear to school are avoided

My concern as a parent of four children in state government schools is that there is a very haphazard approach to the enforcement of school uniform wearing.

Having a set uniform means that there is more peace and harmony in the household as there are less arguments and negotiations about what to wear to school. However, when uniform wearing is not enforced, then the headaches of enforcement are forced back onto the parents, and I wish this was not the case.

Another benefit of school uniforms is that it is less obvious in the school who is 'trendy', wealthy, or struggling as all children dress similarly. School uniform wearing promotes social cohesion and I believe contributes to a more harmonious school community.

However, I believe there is too much individual discretion given to schools to enforce or not school uniform wearing. I understand that School Councils are able to decide what if any school uniform should be worn, but even when this is decided there is inconsistent enforcement of the policies with some schools clearly believing that they do not have the authority to mandate the wearing of uniform. Perhaps the committee could clarify this situation for schools? Our local primary school does not enforce the wearing of uniform and believes that it does not have the power to do so. Our local high school is trying to enforce the wearing of uniform with mixed results.

Thank you for providing me with an opportunity of contributing

Veronica McGowan

**Williamstown VIC**