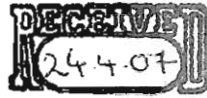




The Salvation Army

Melbourne Central Division



20 April 2007

School Uniform Inquiry Submission 5

Mr Geoff Howard MP
Chair
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Mr Howard,

RE: PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO DRESS CODES AND SCHOOL UNIFORMS IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS – RESPONSE BY THE SALVATION ARMY

The Salvation Army welcomes the opportunity to comment on the inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian Schools. In particular, we wish to address the following points contained in the terms of reference:

- a) The benefits and costs of mandatory school uniforms;
- b) The most cost efficient and practical uniform procurement arrangements;
- c) Matters which need to be considered to ensure dress codes and uniform policies are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation and health promotion policies.

The Salvation Army believes that the wearing of school uniform:

- Gives students a sense of identity and belonging;
- Promotes inclusion;
- Promotes equity amongst students because everyone is required to wear the same;
- Reduces pressure on students to wear, and parents to purchase, the latest fashions, which may not be suitable or cost effective for school.

However, it needs to be recognised that for many Australian families living on low incomes the provision of school uniforms is cost prohibitive. If the wearing of school uniform is to be compulsory they need to be affordable and easily accessible to all. The Salvation Army currently assists many families who simply cannot afford the cost of education expenses at the beginning of each school year.

We recognise that the Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that all children and young adults have the right to education and that ensuring all families have the necessary resources to assist in achieving this goal is fundamental. Measures need to be put in place to ensure access to low cost, appropriate uniforms for families experiencing disadvantage. Schools should ensure when determining the most appropriate uniform that:

- A variety of options are available;
- Financial considerations are given a high priority.

Measures to assist families could include:

- **Subsidy** made available to families on low incomes specifically for the purchase of uniforms. This could operate alongside the "Educational Maintenance Allowance" which is currently available to assist some families with the cost of education in Victoria;
- **Free uniforms**, including sports uniforms, of sufficient quantity to be provided to families on low incomes;
- **Second-hand clothing pools** to be available at all schools, although there is potential for students being forced to wear ill fitting, inappropriate uniforms to be further discriminated against;
- **Individual school policies** to be developed with regard to assisting families who cannot afford uniforms.

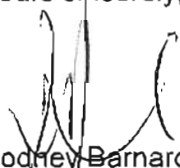
Schools are to be encouraged to be pro-active and commence the assessment and dialogue process with respect to student needs with both students and their families towards the end of each school year rather than waiting until the start of the new year. This will assist in ensuring that students and their families are not confronted with the prospect of entering a new school year without uniforms, thus raising the anxiety for both parent/s and the student/s.

Any assistance available towards the provision of school uniforms should be widely advertised to ensure parents are aware of the availability and avoid the unnecessary embarrassment of needing to ask for assistance.

The requirement to wear compulsory school uniforms has the potential to further discriminate against students from disadvantaged families. There is a need to be extremely sensitive when dealing with students who do not observe the school dress code. The school would need to establish the reasons why a student is not complying with the policy understanding that this may be due to factors such as poverty, transience and the resultant consequences.

The Salvation Army believes that it is vital that schools, parents and the community work together to address the issues and ensure that no child or family in Victoria is discriminated against because of this proposed legislation.

Yours sincerely,



Rodney Barnard (Major)
DIVISIONAL COMMANDER