

Tuesday, 12 June 2007

2007 Parliamentary Inquiry Dress Codes & School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Submission by the Victorian Parents' Council

The Victorian Parents Council represents the interests of parents of children attending non-government schools. This submission is drafted from the responses of member school parents and in relation to the terms of reference for this enquiry.

The types of schools that responded encompassed schools with high, medium and low SES scores as well as special need's schools from the independent and Catholic sectors. Most of the respondent schools have a uniform policy although some do not. It should be noted that all respondents were current or past Presidents of their Parents and Friends Associations and very proud of the uniform policy that their school does or does not set.

All the respondents felt that although it might be appropriate for the State Government to set guidelines and policy regarding uniform in government schools, by their very nature, non-government schools are independent and should set their own guidelines and policies for uniform and dress codes.

Respondents unanimously agreed that **all independent and Catholic schools should have the ability to make decisions about their uniform in consultation and discussion with their school communities**. It is a responsibility that the State Government of Victoria should and must allow its non-government schools to take.

Having said this, respondents had many reasons for the importance of wearing or not wearing a uniform and these comments have been captured below:

"I love the fact that my child gets to wear a uniform and I always loved wearing mine. It means taking pride in ones school and wearing the uniform with respect. The uniform comes with the school and if your child is not prepared to wear one, then you are at the wrong school!"

"It is very much an issue for each school community to decide what best reflects that particular school's culture and monetary demographic."

"Our school has a Uniform Committee which approves all additions to the official uniform and endeavors to have uniformity across the campuses."

"We adhere to strict uniform policy. The school has the right to pick and enforce this in consultation with parents."

"Our school has a set of rules and regulations about how the uniform is to be worn. We have a School Marshall who keeps an eye on the appearance of students and dispenses warnings, demerits and detentions and organizes trips to the barber where necessary. His feedback is that he is supported by the vast majority of parents and the students in general. Students accept a disciplinary action if they feel it's a "fair cop"."

"The role of a uniform is felt to give an identity of which to be proud, to encourage self-esteem by wearing it well and to eliminate any sense of competition in dress standards which might otherwise exist."

"We have no form of uniform assistance other than a second hand shop."

“From a cultural perspective, the uniform is a ‘symbolic representation’ of who we are and how we want the community to see us ... schools need to make that decision with their own constituents. Although a uniform is very nice in theory, it must be worn in a way that replicates how we want the community to see us. The students need to be buy in to this message”
“I love uniforms because it is an egalitarian way of dealing with differences in SES”.

The VPC recommends that each school can be encouraged to make the link between its values, quality of education and identity and how the uniform helps to make that rhetoric a reality in the minds of its students and of its community.

If schools want to have uniforms then it should be part of their leadership strategy to get buy in for the uniform and how it is worn, not just from parents, but from the students themselves. Students are the ones that need to be engaged in whether they wear a uniform and what it means to their sense of belonging with their peers and broader school group.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit. VPC recommends that if more information is to be forth coming about the issues surrounding uniforms from parents then a parent forum from various schools might enable more in-depth discussions. A student forum in this vein would also be quite illuminating.

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