



Department of Education and Training
Government of Western Australia

Your ref.

Our ref: D07/02925

Enquiries:

Ms Karen Ellingford
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament of Victoria
3/157 Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Ellingford

Thank you for your letter dated 30 April 2007 regarding dress requirements for students in Western Australian public schools in connection with a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms.

The questions you have raised are addressed as follows:

- The *School Education Act 1999* provides for School Councils to determine dress codes (Functions of Councils section 128). The Department of Education and Training's *Dress Requirements for Students* policy sets out the rationale and procedures for dress codes and uniforms in public schools. Recent additions have included the exclusion of denim items, a process for applying for exemptions, and extended provisions for encouraging compliance and dealing with non-compliance.
- The Western Australian view is that dress requirements for students play an important role in promoting a positive image of public schools, and creating a sense of identity among students. They also help students learn to engage with employers and the local community. In addition, dress requirements enhance the health and safety of students when involved in school activities, and increase personal safety by allowing easier identification of visitors.
- School Councils have the role of developing and changing dress requirements in consultation with students, parents and staff, taking into account the principles of safety, equity, fairness and consistency. Schools may choose to have their own uniform shops or sell items to families through a local distributor. Before finalising their dress requirements, School Councils consider links with suppliers, availability of garments, type, durability, and manufacturer cost increases, particularly when determining compulsory items.
- School Councils also determine details of procedures for managing exemptions from the dress requirement, assistance with compliance including convening school dress advisory panels and sanctions for non-compliance, and regular reviews of and changes to the requirements.

- Assistance is available through an annual clothing allowance of \$115 per student to parents of secondary students who hold specified pensioner or family health care cards.
- The Principal grants exemptions, imposes sanctions and arranges support and assistance where there are difficulties with compliance (for example through clothing loan schemes). School Advisory Panels may be convened to offer assistance and support to parents to resolve disputes with the school and, wherever possible, achieve compliance with the school dress requirements. This form of local negotiation can often overcome the need for sanctions.
- Where all other avenues for achieving compliance are unsuccessful, and provided it can be demonstrated that financial reasons are not a contributing factor, the Principal may apply sanctions as prescribed in the *School Education Regulations 2000*.
- Principals have a range of sanctions available to them which must be applied in line with processes approved by the School Council. Students enrolled in primary programs (Years 1-7) can be prevented from attending any activity in which they are representing the school or attending or participating in any school activity which, in the opinion of the Principal, is not part of the educational program.
- In addition to the range of sanctions available to primary school principals, secondary school principals can choose to address non-compliance through the school's *Behaviour Management Policy*. Such disciplinary sanctions may be applied when students show continued defiance of the school's dress requirements, but must not include suspensions, exclusions, or any approach that would inhibit a student from participating in the normal educational program. Sanctions that damage students' external career prospects, such as negative comments in references or school reports, are also prohibited.
- The responses of school communities to the new policy have, in the main, been very positive and schools are successfully managing issues of compliance and individual objection.

For your information, I have attached a copy of the *Dress Requirements for Students in WA Public Schools* publication which has proved a useful means of providing parents with further information about the approach adopted in this state. Ms Siobhain Milbourne, Strategic Policy and Planning Branch, will be happy to assist with any further enquiries and can be contacted on (08) 9264 5077 or siobhain.milbourne@det.wa.edu.au.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to your Parliamentary Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



SHARYN O'NEILL
A/DIRECTOR GENERAL