



Education and Training Committee

Final Report

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

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Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

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Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present the report of the Education and Training Committee on its Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools. As a former teacher, I am aware that issues relating to school uniforms are relatively low level when compared to the many other important issues surrounding schools' core business of teaching and learning. This inquiry has nevertheless attracted an unprecedented level of interest, enabling the Committee to develop its relationship with a broad range of school communities and other education stakeholders. The inquiry received the highest number of written submissions ever made to an inquiry conducted by this Committee, as well as having a very high number of participants in public hearings. The significant level of interest in this inquiry was supported by the innovative research methods employed by the Committee. These included a survey of over 600 Victorian schools and a public hearing specifically for school students, at which 125 primary and secondary students from around Victoria discussed a mock 'School Uniform Bill' in the parliamentary chambers.

This inquiry has also differed from previous inquiries undertaken by the Committee in so far as its focus has largely been away from the classroom. Instead, the inquiry has focused more on day-to-day aspects of school life not directly relating to student learning. Among the important issues raised in the inquiry were health and safety considerations, the prevention of discrimination and the building of positive relationships between schools and their communities. Perhaps it is for this reason that the inquiry has attracted evidence from such a diverse range of stakeholders, including schools, parents, students, industry representatives and government and non-government organisations. Their valuable input has clearly demonstrated that while the core business of education may centre on teachers and students, many other stakeholders who are not directly involved in the education process also have interests in schools.

The Committee found that dress codes and school uniform policies can have a significant impact on the relationship between schools and their communities. Discussions regarding dress codes or school uniforms provide a readily accessible forum for cooperation between stakeholders, which may also help establish a foundation for schools and communities to work together on more complex educational issues. On the other hand, the Committee found that dress codes and school uniforms can sometimes become the subject of bitter disputes. The Committee believes that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has a key role to play in providing both guidance and mediation, to ensure that dress codes and school uniforms engender cooperation rather than conflict between schools and their communities.

The key finding to emerge in the Committee's investigations was that one size definitely does not fit all when it comes to dress codes and school uniforms. Parents, students, teachers and others often have passionate views about dress codes and school uniforms, which also reflect deeper perspectives on schooling and education. The Committee heard, for example, that requiring students to wear a school uniform can help promote school pride and encourage students to be disciplined, responsible members of the school community. On the other hand, the Committee heard that some schools believe that the absence of a uniform fosters the creativity and self-expression that they regard as essential to success in education. Whatever their values and preferences, the Committee found that Victorian school communities typically hold strong views on student dress and appearance and the Committee therefore supports their right to choose the most appropriate dress codes or school uniform policies.

The Committee would like to extend its sincere gratitude to the many contributors who made written submissions and appeared before the Committee during public

hearings. In particular, the Committee recognises the remarkable contributions of the students from the 32 schools who participated in public hearings for this inquiry. The Committee acknowledges that their participation involved significant time and effort both from students and teachers, and commends all participants on the high quality of their evidence.

In addition, I would like to personally thank the members of the Committee for their time, energy and interest throughout this inquiry. Members of the Committee would also like to extend their thanks to the Committee staff for their invaluable assistance. Their dedication, skills and hard work are reflected in the success of the Committee's evidence-gathering processes and the quality of the final report.

I trust that the recommendations made in this report will provide schools with the sense of direction they need to address a range of contemporary issues, and ensure that their dress codes and school uniform policies meet the needs of their communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geoff Howard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'G' and 'H'.

Geoff Howard MP
Chair

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Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Introduction

The environment in which today's schools are developing their dress codes and school uniform policies is complex and changing. A growing emphasis on diversity in the classroom and student-centred learning approaches has challenged the traditional notions of conformity that school uniforms are often seen to embody. At the same time, education is becoming more competitive, placing pressure on schools to demonstrate high standards and develop a brand or image that will distinguish them in the educational market. In this context, the Education and Training Committee was charged with conducting an inquiry into dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools.

Evidence to this inquiry was received over the period March 2007 to October 2007, using a variety of methods. Oral evidence was received in public hearings from primary and secondary students; teachers; parents; educational bodies in the government and non-government sectors; clothing and textile industry and union representatives; social welfare organisations; and organisations representing Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Committee heard evidence from 181 witnesses in total, including 125 primary and secondary school students who gathered at Parliament House to debate the mock 'School Uniform Bill 2007', prepared by the Committee specifically for the event.

In addition, the Committee received a substantial body of written evidence from schools and other members of the stakeholder groups listed above, including 125 written submissions and a significant amount of supplementary written material. Further evidence was collected through an online survey completed by nearly 600 Victorian school principals from the Catholic, government and independent sectors. Additionally, the Committee conducted an in-depth analysis of 60 current Victorian school uniform policies and price lists, from across the three school sectors.

Chapter 2: Current Policies and Practices

A key question raised in this inquiry was whether it is desirable for Victorian schools to have uniforms. It became clear early in the inquiry that there is widespread agreement that choices about school uniforms should continue to be made by individual schools and their communities. The Committee found that the views of school communities both for and against the wearing of school uniforms are equally strong. For this reason, the Committee does not believe it is appropriate to introduce a general requirement that school uniforms should be worn in Victorian schools.

Although various jurisdictions in Australia have considered making school uniforms compulsory over recent years, only the Northern Territory has so far introduced such a policy. However, most education departments in Australia do provide some guidelines to assist schools when developing and implementing their dress codes and school uniform policies. Following consultation in relation to the *Education Act* 2006, Queensland is the only jurisdiction in which detailed guidelines around school uniforms have been legislated. The Committee does not view such legislation as necessary in Victoria at this point in time, but does believe there is the need for more detailed guidance to schools on a range of matters associated with dress codes and school uniforms.

The Committee found that 72.8 per cent of Victorian schools have a 'full' compulsory school uniform, which requires students to wear summer and winter uniforms specified by the school. A further 12.4 per cent of schools have a 'basic'

compulsory uniform (limited specifications for clothing such as wearing school colours or some items with a school logo), while 7.2 per cent of schools have an optional uniform and 0.5 per cent have an 'occasional' uniform. General dress codes, which specify only broad requirements about student clothing, are in place in 2.9 per cent of schools, while 2.8 per cent have no uniform and 1.4 per cent describe their policy as 'other'. Government schools are the least likely to have a full compulsory uniform (55.3%), but most likely to have either a 'basic' compulsory uniform (23.8%) or optional uniform (14.7%).

Schools typically include a range of general requirements in their dress codes or school uniform policies. The Committee found that these include: the items to be included in the uniform (if any); when the uniform should be worn; how the uniform should be worn; and to which students it applies. The Committee found significant variations across all of these elements within Victorian school uniform policies. In addition, most schools make rules about other aspects of student appearance, including hair styles, facial hair, jewellery, body and facial piercings and make-up. Facial and body piercings proved to be the most controversial aspect of student appearance, as they are increasingly commonplace in Australian society but often incompatible with the values that schools wish to reflect in their uniform policies.

Another contentious issue raised in the inquiry was whether dress codes and school uniform policies should also apply to teachers and other school staff. The Committee found that 43.8 per cent of Victorian schools (including 27.1% of government schools) have some form of written dress code for their staff, either setting out general or specific standards of dress. Although the Committee did not consider staff dress codes in detail, it notes that the appearance of school staff may have an influence on students, and believes that many of the issues covered by the inquiry are relevant to dress codes or uniforms for both students and staff. The Committee therefore recommends that schools consider staff dress and appearance when developing and reviewing their dress codes and uniform policies.

Chapter 3: Health and Safety

The issue of how student health, safety and wellbeing can and should be reflected in dress codes and school uniform policies was an important consideration during this inquiry. The Committee investigated both the direct and indirect impact of dress codes and school uniforms on a range of physical and psychological aspects of student health and wellbeing.

The Committee found that both schools with and without uniforms have a range of rules relating to general health and safety standards for school clothing, footwear and other aspects of student appearance such as hair and jewellery. Many schools also report additional health and safety standards for specific classes, including science and technology-related classes and physical education.

The Committee found that one of the most direct ways in which dress codes and school uniforms can support student health and wellbeing is through sun protection. The Committee believes sun protection is of such importance that all Victorian schools should be required to include a statement addressing sun protection in their dress codes or school uniform policies. This should include providing all students with an option or requirement to wear a sun protective hat, as well as appropriate standards relating to sun protective clothing and sunglasses.

On the other hand, the Committee was surprised to hear that some school uniform policies do not incorporate items of clothing that offer sufficient warmth or other protection from the elements during winter. The Committee therefore suggests that schools be flexible in their enforcement of dress codes and uniform policies in times of extreme weather, and provide sufficient options to ensure that students can be comfortable in all weather conditions.

Given current community concern about growing levels of childhood obesity, the potential for school uniforms to either encourage or inhibit physical activity was of

particular interest to the Committee. The Committee believes that all schools should carefully consider how their school uniform policies can contribute to increased physical activity among students, both during school hours and while travelling to and from school. In particular, the Committee believes that schools should include non-restrictive clothing options in their uniforms, or allow students to change into appropriate clothing and footwear for breaks or active travel between home and school.

The Committee heard a range of views regarding the potential influence of school uniforms on student mental health and wellbeing. Some of the most frequently cited benefits of having a school uniform were the sense of belonging it engenders in the school community; student pride; and higher self-esteem. Many submissions also suggested that school uniforms can remove peer pressure to follow the latest fashion trends and reduce teasing or bullying among students. On the other hand, school communities without uniforms argued that students build confidence and a positive self-image by being challenged to make choices about their personal presentation. They also dismissed any concerns that their students are at increased risk of competitive dressing or bullying.

Other issues considered by the Committee with respect to health and safety included: broader issues associated with student security; health and safety issues associated with body and facial piercings; risks posed by cords and chin straps on hats and other items of clothing; and the promotion of spinal health through the use of appropriate school bags. Given the importance of student health and safety, the Committee makes a number of recommendations relating to further guidelines that may be given to schools to help them consider these issues.

Chapter 4: Anti-discrimination Issues

One of the most complex issues considered by the Committee during this inquiry was that of anti-discrimination. Although schools have a legal obligation to avoid discrimination, the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* provides a specific exception to enable educational authorities to set 'reasonable' standards of dress, appearance and behaviour for students. In relation to a school, a standard is taken to be 'reasonable' if the school has taken into account the views of the school community in setting the standard.

Furthermore, all Victorian government schools are also now required to comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. The Charter provides for a number of rights relating to freedom of thought, expression, religion and culture. Again, however, these rights may be subject to 'such reasonable limits as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society'. The Committee heard from the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission that considerable uncertainty still exists about how such laws may be applied in practice.

The Committee believes that all Victorian schools should seek to ensure that their dress codes and school uniform policies are free from direct and indirect discrimination. This is to both mitigate any legal risk and to promote values of diversity, equity and respect in their communities. Given the legal complexities, however, the Committee recognises that some schools may need additional guidance to ensure they meet the requirements of current anti-discrimination legislation. This is evidenced by various complaints regarding discrimination in dress codes and uniform policies that have been referred to education and legal authorities throughout Australia. Specific areas to be covered by improved guidelines should include: gender and gender identity; age; physical attributes; religion, ethnicity and culture; and philosophical or conscientious objections.

The Committee received a substantial body of evidence addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly with respect to clothing and other items with religious significance for the wearer. The two items most frequently mentioned throughout the inquiry were the hijab (Islamic headscarf) and the kirpan (Sikh ceremonial sword). The Committee found the prevailing view to be

that Victorian schools should accommodate clothing and other items with religious significance. The Committee therefore supports the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's current advice to schools, that exemptions to dress codes and school uniform policies on religious grounds should be permitted, but recommends that the Department's advice be supplemented by more detailed guidelines and examples of best practice.

Another issue arising during the inquiry was the potential for a dress code or school uniform policy to give rise to a philosophical or conscientious objection. The Committee found that most Victorian school principals are unlikely to consider philosophical objections as legitimate grounds for exemption from a dress code or school uniform policy. Nevertheless, the Committee found evidence to suggest that schools may have a legal obligation to give consideration to such objections.

In essence, the Committee recognises the rights of students and their families to pursue genuine philosophical or conscientious objections to a dress code or school uniform policy. At the same time, parents need to consider the potential negative impacts on their children's relationship with the school and their peers when pursuing exemptions from a school uniform policy based on a philosophical objection. The Committee also believes that clearer departmental guidelines may help to minimise the negative effects for parties involved in such disputes in the future.

Chapter 5: Enforcement and Sanctions

The enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools proved to be another contentious issue during this inquiry. Many government schools reported that they do not currently have sufficient power to enforce their dress codes and school uniform policies. On the other hand, the Committee also heard arguments that strict enforcement is inappropriate for dress codes and school uniform policies, and that enforcement should be the subject of ongoing negotiation between schools, students and their communities.

The Committee's survey found that enforcement of the school dress code or uniform policy is described as 'strict' in 62.3 per cent of Victorian schools, 'variable' in 25.1 per cent of schools and 'lenient' in 4.9 per cent of schools. Schools in the Catholic and independent sectors are more likely to describe the enforcement of their school uniform policies as 'strict', while government schools are more likely to describe their level of enforcement as 'variable' or 'lenient'. Enforcement is likely to be more strict in secondary schools than in primary schools. The Committee accepts that attitudes to enforcement may vary among schools, but believes that schools and communities should establish shared standards for the enforcement of a dress code or uniform policy, to ensure that expectations regarding compliance within a school are as consistent as possible.

The Committee received conflicting evidence about how the enforcement of a dress code or school uniform policy may affect the school environment. Some witnesses and submissions suggested that enforcement of a dress code is time-consuming, particularly for minor infringements, and can have a negative effect on teacher-student relationships. On the other hand, other schools suggested that their school uniforms create a more disciplined learning environment, thereby reducing the time spent on other behavioural issues.

The Committee found that schools apply a wide range of sanctions in the enforcement of their dress codes and school uniform policies. For minor infringements, 89.5 per cent of schools use 'gentle reminders or encouragement' to help get students into correct uniform. They may also ask the student to remove the non-compliant item and, sometimes, replace it with a compliant item supplied by the school. For serious infringements of a dress code or school uniform policy, the most commonly applied sanctions are sending a letter to parents (64.6%) and holding a meeting with parents and the student (60.5%). One of the challenges faced by schools is how to enforce compliance where the breach is caused, either deliberately or inadvertently, by parents rather than students themselves.

An even more contentious issue is whether students should be excluded from learning opportunities, or even suspended, for failing to comply with a school uniform policy. While the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development currently advises against such practices, the Committee found that 33.6 per cent of schools with secondary students are prepared to suspend students for serious breaches of the dress code or school uniform policy. This includes 26.4 per cent of Victorian government schools with secondary students. Furthermore, 74.9 per cent of schools with secondary students would send students who breach the dress code or uniform policy home to change. The Committee found that 59.4 per cent of schools would ask a student not return to school until they are wearing the correct uniform.

Most education departments in Australia advise schools against excluding students from classes for breaches of their dress codes or school uniform policies. However, the Committee notes that the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families allows student exclusion and suspension where breaches of the school uniform policy are persistent and defiant. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development update its policies to reflect the sanctions that may be imposed on students for infringements of the school uniform policy and the circumstances in which they may apply, including various forms of exclusion as a last resort.

Chapter 6: Costs

As the education environment has become more competitive, student dress and appearance has become an important aspect of how schools present themselves to the community. The Committee heard that some schools have felt increasing pressure to adopt more 'traditional' and expensive school uniforms, to put them on equal footing with their more 'prestigious' competitors. Other schools reported pressure to reduce the cost of their school uniforms to a level that is attractive to parents from their local communities.

Both schools with and without uniforms argued that there are cost benefits associated with their approach to student clothing. Schools with a uniform typically argued that it eases financial pressure on parents, by removing the need to buy expensive fashion clothing for their children. School uniforms were also often described as better quality and more durable than fashion garments of comparable cost. On the other hand, schools without uniforms argue that casual clothing must be purchased for weekend and holiday wear anyway, and that wearing this clothing to school maximises its use. Such schools also argued that their uniform-free policy lessens students' interest in expensive brands and competitive dressing. The Committee therefore concludes that neither a school uniform nor casual clothing is necessarily cheaper, but that it depends on the nature of the garments purchased.

The Committee undertook an in-depth analysis of the costs of 60 girls and boys uniforms in a random sample of Victorian primary and secondary schools, across all sectors and metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. Taking into account only a single set of basic, compulsory school uniform items (excluding footwear), the Committee found that the total average cost of outfitting a primary school student for the year is around \$380 for girls and \$340 for boys. For secondary students, the average minimum cost of a school uniform for the year is around \$665 for girls and \$590 for boys. The Committee notes, however, that the addition of footwear, duplicate purchases, and additional optional or compulsory items will mean that the real costs of outfitting Victorian students is usually much higher. The Committee found that school uniform costs vary significantly across school sectors, with schools in the independent sector typically having the most expensive school uniforms.

Given the significant costs of purchasing school clothing, the Committee believes that all Victorian schools, particularly those in the government sector, have a responsibility to ensure that the cost of a school uniform is set at a level that is

affordable to the members of their school communities. In particular, schools should take care in selecting the items to be included in their uniforms, as well as any design decisions that will add to the cost. Two of the items that attracted substantial comment throughout the inquiry were school blazers and compulsory school logos. The Committee found that government schools are increasingly incorporating these items into their school uniform designs in order to improve their public image.

In addition to the obligation on government schools to keep the costs of school uniforms reasonable, the Committee heard that both schools and the Victorian Government have a responsibility to provide financial support to help needy families meet the cost of a school uniform. The Committee notes current mechanisms for assisting families with the cost of uniforms, including the Educational Maintenance Allowance, School Start bonus and, for government school students, support through the State Schools' Relief Committee. The Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review these mechanisms and investigate strategies to support the activities of the State Schools' Relief Committee, as well as potential alternative models for financial support for the purchase of school uniforms.

Chapter 7: Purchasing and Distribution

If schools choose to adopt a uniform policy that includes specific garments or other items, they must make arrangements for the supply and distribution of those items. This requires schools to make potentially complex business decisions that may affect all members of their school community.

Industry trends over the last decade have resulted in an increasing number of school uniforms being manufactured overseas. The Committee notes the importance of local or Australian materials and manufacturing to many schools and school uniform suppliers. However, the Committee also notes that some schools will prefer to access overseas alternatives due to cost considerations. The Committee therefore believes that the choice of Australian made school uniforms should remain at a school community level, but that information should be made readily available about the origin of school uniform materials and products.

The Committee found that a number of schools in all sectors currently set standards for the procurement of their school uniforms relating to FairWear (ethical manufacturing) and sustainable or environmentally friendly manufacturing. Organisations representing the interests of workers in the industry called for schools to require manufacturers to demonstrate that they provide ethical wages and conditions, in accordance with relevant legislation and industry awards. The Committee acknowledges the significant interest in these issues among Victorian schools, and notes that relevant information is available through industry and community organisations to support schools in discussions with their communities and uniform suppliers.

The Committee heard that schools must give consideration to a wide range of complex business issues when making arrangements for school uniform procurement. These include tendering processes, licensing agreements, legal requirements and the advantages or disadvantages of using single and multiple suppliers. The Committee therefore supports the recommendation of the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia, in suggesting that government and industry bodies work together to develop resources for schools on effective school uniform purchasing processes.

Schools with uniforms must also determine the most cost-effective method for distributing their uniform items to students and families. Common arrangements include an on-site school uniform shop staffed by volunteers, or an off-site commercial retail outlet. A growing number of schools now also outsource the management of their on-site school uniform shops to third-party suppliers. The Committee heard that each model may have certain advantages, either through allowing schools to maintain control of the distribution process or through utilising

industry-specific knowledge and skills from external sources. At the same time, each model can have certain disadvantages. The Committee heard that selling school uniforms through off-site outlets may be more expensive due to 'commercial realities', whereas school-run uniform shops can also be expensive due to inefficiencies in stock management. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development work with industry to provide advice about the various school uniform distribution models available, including detailed advice on managing a school uniform shop.

The Committee found that some Victorian schools make a profit on the sale of their uniform items. The Committee heard various arguments both for and against schools using uniform sales as a fundraising opportunity, and recognises that profit on school uniform sales is a multifaceted issue. The issue proved particularly complex for government schools, which are subject to certain obligations under Victorian policy and legislation, including a requirement to keep the price of 'essential education items' to a minimum. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate the issues around profit on school uniform sales, and publish a clear policy statement on its position.

Chapter 8: Consultation and Review

Like other school policies, dress codes and school uniform policies should be subject to review, to ensure that they remain responsive to the needs of the community. The Committee heard of a range of circumstances in which school communities might initiate a review of a dress code or school uniform policy, including changing demographics, commercial considerations, or direct requests from students or parents.

The Committee supports the view of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that reviews of dress codes and school uniform policies should respond to any significant emerging needs or concerns. The Committee nevertheless notes that regular, formal reviews are also an important way of maintaining consistency and clarity in school uniform policies. In the Committee's view, dress codes and school uniform policies should be reviewed every three to five years.

While the Committee recognises the authority of the School Council to make final decisions relating to dress codes and school uniform policies, it notes that such decisions should involve substantial consideration of the views of the school community. The Committee found compelling reasons why community consultation may be especially important for dress codes and school uniform policies. First, the successful implementation of a dress code or school uniform policy requires cooperation not only from students, but also from their parents and carers. Dress codes and school uniform policies also provide a particularly valuable opportunity for schools to engage their communities on an accessible and universally relevant issue.

The Committee supports the view that consultation around dress codes and school uniforms should involve a wide range of stakeholders within the school community. A number of submissions emphasised that consultation regarding school dress codes and uniform policies should actively involve staff, students and parents. Additional groups identified as key stakeholders in school uniform consultations include local indigenous networks, minority ethnic and religious groups, and groups representing students with special needs or disabilities. A number of cases came to light where schools made significant efforts to consult and communicate widely with their communities in developing and reviewing their dress codes and uniform policies. The Committee recommends that such examples of best practice be incorporated into departmental guidelines.

The Committee notes that schools may sometimes be faced with instances where an individual parent or student has a special need relating to a dress code or school uniform that differs from the community consensus. In many such cases, it

may be appropriate for an exemption or variation to be negotiated. The Committee also notes, however, that there will be some circumstances in which an objection to a dress code or school uniform policy cannot be resolved at the local level, and may be referred to a system representative. The Committee found that while many such complaints are investigated when referred to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's regional offices, it is also common for complaints to be referred back to the school. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department review the services available for the mediation of school uniform-related disputes at a regional level.

The Committee also heard the view that any parents or students who disagree with a dress code or school uniform policy developed by the school community should seek another school. The Committee believes that for many parents and students joining a new school, a commitment to the dress code or school uniform policy may provide a way to demonstrate their willingness to support and participate in the school community. At the same time, the Committee believes that students and families have an obligation to comply with the rules and policies of the school in which they enrol. The Committee therefore accepts that schools may refer any families not willing to comply with the dress codes or uniform policies at the time of enrolment, to the Department for mediation.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This report demonstrates that developing a dress code or school uniform policy requires schools to address a wide variety of important issues. The Committee found that many dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools currently address only some of these issues, and sometimes go no further than setting out the requisite colour or style of student clothing. Most of the recommendations in this report describe the areas in which the Committee believes the current departmental guidelines should be revised or expanded, to ensure that all essential issues are considered. The Committee also recommends that the Department develop a sample or pro forma dress code or school uniform policy, for schools to use as a basis for developing their own policies in consultation with their communities.

Where a school is able to demonstrate appropriate consideration of the issues outlined in the template and guidelines, the Committee believes that it should receive full departmental support for the implementation of its dress code or school uniform policy. The Committee also recommends that the Department make information available to parents and other members of school communities, clarifying the rights and responsibilities of everyone involved in the development and implementation of a dress code or school uniform policy. In the Committee's view, clearer and more consistent guidelines will facilitate the development of dress codes and school uniform policies and resolution of related disputes, and help schools, students and communities focus instead on the core business of teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Chapter 2: Current Policies and Practices

RECOMMENDATION 2.1 (PAGE 16)

That decisions regarding dress codes and school uniform policies remain the responsibility of school councils, in consultation with their communities.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2 (PAGE 23)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines encourage schools to consider standards for staff dress and appearance during the development and review of dress codes and school uniform policies.

Chapter 3: Health and Safety

RECOMMENDATION 3.1 (PAGE 29)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to include a statement addressing sun protection in their dress codes or school uniform policies.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2 (PAGE 29)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development promote best practice case studies for incorporating sun protective clothing and sunglasses into dress codes and school uniform policies in the guidelines they provide to schools.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3 (PAGE 33)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to make a sun protective hat available to students as part of their dress codes or school uniform policies.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4 (PAGE 35)

That guidelines developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development include advice to assist schools to develop dress codes and school uniform policies that ensure students can be comfortable in all weather conditions.

RECOMMENDATION 3.5 (PAGE 40)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to consider how their school uniform policies can contribute to greater levels of physical activity among students.

RECOMMENDATION 3.6 (PAGE 41)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate the health and safety issues associated with facial and body piercings, and publish guidelines to assist school communities in developing, implementing and reviewing piercings policies.

RECOMMENDATION 3.7 (PAGE 43)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish guidelines to assist schools in making appropriate decisions about school bags when developing and reviewing their dress codes and school uniform policies. Such guidelines may also include standards relating to the weight of materials students are expected to carry to and from school.

RECOMMENDATION 3.8 (PAGE 44)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development incorporate information regarding cords and chinstraps on sun hats and other articles of clothing in their safety guidelines for schools, especially at a primary level.

Chapter 4: Anti-discrimination Issues

RECOMMENDATION 4.1 (PAGE 48)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, publish guidelines to clarify schools' legal obligations under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. Such guidelines should include:

- detailed advice on legal requirements and how these are best implemented in practice;
- greater clarity regarding the legal rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community with respect to dress codes and school uniform policies; and
- specific examples of relevant case law to support general legal advice.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2 (PAGE 51)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish detailed guidelines relating to the prevention of gender discrimination in dress codes and school uniform policies, including guidelines for student appearance, and clothing choices for female students.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3 (PAGE 59)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to accommodate clothing and other items with religious significance where appropriate, within a framework developed by the Department.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4 (PAGE 61)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish guidelines to assist schools with appropriate responses to conscientious or philosophical objections to their dress code or school uniform policy raised by members of their school community.

Chapter 5: Enforcement and Sanctions

RECOMMENDATION 5.1 (PAGE 66)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to establish, in consultation with their communities, clear expectations regarding compliance with their dress codes and school uniform policies, to ensure that a consistent approach to enforcement is applied throughout the school.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2 (PAGE 77)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish detailed guidelines regarding acceptable sanctions for infringements of dress codes or school uniform policies. This should involve discussion of specific sanctions, including various forms of exclusion, and the circumstances in which they may be applied.

Chapter 6: Costs

RECOMMENDATION 6.1 (PAGE 92)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to demonstrate to their school communities that they have evaluated the cost implications of their selected school uniform to ensure that costs fall within expectations of the school community.

RECOMMENDATION 6.2 (PAGE 99)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate strategies to ensure the continuation and possible expansion of the activities of the State Schools' Relief Committee, and/or alternative models for financial support for assistance with school uniforms.

RECOMMENDATION 6.3 (PAGE 99)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to include in their dress codes and school uniform policies information about the options available for low-income families to access financial support, to help them meet the costs of school clothing.

Chapter 7: Purchasing and Distribution

RECOMMENDATION 7.1 (PAGE 110)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with schools and industry representatives, assess the resources currently available to assist schools in their school uniform procurement arrangements, and publish additional guidelines as necessary.

RECOMMENDATION 7.2 (PAGE 114)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with relevant industry representatives, publish improved guidelines regarding distribution models for school uniform items, including detailed advice regarding the management of school uniform shops.

RECOMMENDATION 7.3 (PAGE 116)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish guidelines stating its position on profit margins on the sale of school uniform items by government schools.

RECOMMENDATION 7.4 (PAGE 11)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to publish profit and loss statements relating to the sales of school uniform items in their annual financial reporting.

Chapter 8: Consultation and Review

RECOMMENDATION 8.1 (PAGE 121)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advise schools to review their dress codes and school uniform policies every three to five years in consultation with their communities, addressing all the issues covered in departmental guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION 8.2 (PAGE 128)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development incorporate into its guidelines for dress codes and school uniform policies examples of best practice in consultation and communication between schools and their communities.

RECOMMENDATION 8.3 (PAGE 129)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish further guidelines regarding best practice processes for considering exemptions to dress codes and school uniform policies, including a requirement that reasons for the refusal of an application for exemption be provided to the student and/or parent involved.

RECOMMENDATION 8.4 (PAGE 132)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review the recent changes to complaints handling within the Department to ensure that they address concerns about the resolution of disputes relating to dress codes and school uniform policies.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

RECOMMENDATION 9.1 (PAGE 137)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development create a template for schools to use in the development and review of their dress codes and school uniform policies, covering all major issues raised in this inquiry.

RECOMMENDATION 9.2 (PAGE 137)

That in the event of any disputes regarding dress codes or school uniform policies, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development give full support to any school that can demonstrate that they have given appropriate consideration to all issues contained in the Department's template for dress codes and school uniform policies and associated guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION 9.3 (PAGE 137)

That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ensure that information regarding rights, responsibilities and processes relating to the implementation of a dress code or school uniform policy is available to all members of school communities.

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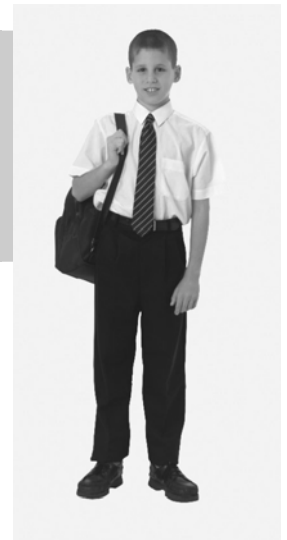
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Chapter 1:

Introduction



Today's schools are developing their dress codes and school uniform policies in a complex and rapidly changing environment. Many recent developments in curriculum and pedagogy in Victoria reflect a trend towards student-centred approaches and individualised learning. This growing emphasis on diversity in the classroom has challenged the traditional notions of conformity that school uniforms are often seen to embody. At the same time, education is becoming more competitive, placing pressure on schools to demonstrate high standards and develop a brand or image that will distinguish them in the educational market. The student uniform (or absence thereof) can be a powerful expression of the unique identity or culture of a school.

Developing dress codes and school uniform policies also requires schools to negotiate within a complex commercial environment. Schools that choose to have uniforms can select from a vast array of options, from a variety of Australian and overseas sources. At the same time, today's students are becoming increasingly discerning consumers, especially with respect to fashions and clothing. For many schools, this has strengthened the importance of school uniforms as a means of protecting students and their parents from marketing pressures. For others, it has heightened the need to give students the opportunity to experiment with clothing, and learn to make independent choices.

Changes in the legal framework surrounding dress codes and school uniforms have placed further pressures on dress codes and school uniform policies. The increased prominence of human rights and anti-discrimination legislation has affected the ways in which schools manage the growing diversity in their student populations. School dress codes and uniform policies must also reflect obligations under law to provide safe and healthy environments for work, play and learning.

While all of these factors have caused the nature and implementation of dress codes and school uniforms to evolve over time, they remain an important part of school life in the majority of Victorian schools. Whether wearing it, purchasing it, enforcing it, or simply being part of the community that it represents, a dress code or school uniform affects all members of a school's community in some way. For this reason, dress codes and school uniform policies must take into account not only the educational, commercial and legal environment in which they are developed, but also the views of school communities.

It is in this context that the Committee investigated and considered the issues facing Victorian schools in establishing and implementing dress codes and school uniform policies for their students. The Committee believes that the recommendations in this report will support schools, communities and education systems in considering these issues, and developing dress codes and school uniform policies that comply with all relevant policy and legislation. At the same time, the Committee intends for its recommendations to be implemented in such a way as to provide sufficient flexibility to enable schools to take advantage of the choices available to them, in tailoring their dress codes or school uniforms to the needs and preferences of their communities.

Functions of the Committee

The Education and Training Committee comprises seven Members of Parliament, with five drawn from the Legislative Assembly and two from the Legislative Council. Mr Geoff Howard MP chairs the Committee.

The Education and Training Committee is constituted under the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003*. The Committee's specific function under the Act is to:

Inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with education or training if the Committee is required or permitted so to do by or under the Act.

Terms of Reference

On 1 March 2007, the Education and Training Committee received a terms of reference, by resolution of the Legislative Assembly, to inquire into, consider and report on dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools. In particular, the Committee is to consider and report on:

- a) the benefits and costs of mandatory school uniforms;
- b) the views of school communities about dress codes and school uniforms;
- c) the most cost efficient and practical uniform procurement arrangements;
- d) matters which need to be considered to ensure dress codes and uniform policies are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation and health promotion policies;
- e) appropriate enforcement and sanctions;
- f) appropriate exemption criteria and processes; and
- g) national and international trends.

The Committee is required to table a report in Parliament no later than 31 March 2008.

Inquiry Methodology

Call for Submissions

The terms of reference were advertised in the following newspapers:

The Age	Saturday 24 March 2007
Herald Sun	Saturday 24 March 2007
Education Age	Monday 26 March 2007
Herald Sun Learn	Tuesday 27 March 2007
Education Times	Thursday 19 April 2007
Local Newspapers	Saturday 6 May – Friday 12 May 2007

In addition to advertising, a mail-out of approximately 240 organisations was conducted, advising them of the terms of reference and inviting written submissions. The mail-out targeted key government departments and agencies; the school sector; parent organisations; teacher associations; cultural and religious organisations and associations; school uniform manufacturers and suppliers; and social welfare organisations.

The Committee received 125 written submissions to the inquiry (Appendix A), along with a substantial body of supplementary written material. Submissions came from a wide range of school communities, government agencies, industry representatives, community organisations and individuals, reflecting the broad public interest in the inquiry.

Literature Review

The Committee undertook an extensive review of Australian and international literature regarding dress codes and school uniform policies. The review incorporated many government, academic, media and online sources, covering approximately the last decade. The literature review aimed to:

- provide a context for the inquiry in terms of current theory, policy and research; and
- identify emerging local and international trends, issues and developments.

Briefings and Public Hearings

Ms Helen Clarke, Manager, Community and Stakeholder Relations Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, attended a Committee meeting on 16 April 2007, to brief the Committee on the Department's current policy on dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian government schools. She also outlined some of the major issues facing schools when developing, implementing and reviewing their dress codes and school uniform policies.

A series of formal hearings took place during the period April 2007 to September 2007, involving 181 witnesses (Appendix B). Participants in public hearings included members of a range of school communities and representatives of a wide range of educational organisations, across all sectors and levels of schooling. In addition, the Committee heard from school uniform manufacturers and suppliers, the Textiles, Clothing & Footwear Union and other relevant industry bodies. Various community and cultural groups also contributed to the inquiry through public hearings.

The Committee conducted one public hearing at a school site, at Princes Hill Secondary College on 31 July 2007. The hearing was scheduled in response to an invitation made by Princes Hill Secondary College, Carlton North, for the Committee to experience its 'uniform-free' culture first-hand. The Committee heard the views of Princes Hill Secondary College students, staff and parent representatives regarding the College's policy of not requiring students to wear a school uniform. At the hearing, the Committee also heard from teacher, student and parent representatives from one of the College's feeder schools, Princes Hill Primary School.

Interstate Investigations

On 20 April 2007, the Committee wrote to education departments throughout Australia, seeking information about their dress code and school uniform policies. The Committee was pleased to receive responses from all states and territories and was particularly interested in the introduction of a compulsory school uniform policy in the Northern Territory. It was decided that the Committee would conduct investigations in the Northern Territory in June 2007. Individuals involved in these discussions are listed in Appendix C.

Public Hearing for Students at Parliament House

Of particular value to this inquiry was the public hearing held for students at Parliament House on 6 September 2007. The hearing brought together 125 Victorian students from 30 government schools selected by the Committee to represent a diverse range of locations and communities, and a variety of dress codes and school uniforms. The eight primary schools selected each sent teams of four or five students, comprising 38 attendees in total. All except one of the 22 secondary schools sent four students, resulting in a total of 87 attendees (refer Appendix B).

Structure and Purpose

The Committee intended the hearing to serve two main purposes:

- 1) to obtain the views of Victorian primary and secondary students regarding dress codes and school uniforms; and
- 2) to provide students with an educational experience of Victorian parliamentary processes.

To fulfil these objectives, the Committee structured the hearing around the discussion of a mock 'Bill' drafted by the Committee, entitled the *'School Uniform Bill 2007'*. The 'Bill' was divided into six clauses covering the major issues that had been raised in submissions, public hearings, and research for the inquiry. Each secondary school was allocated one or two clauses to discuss during the hearing and each primary school was allocated three clauses. A copy of the 'Bill', together with the clauses allocated to each school and the discussion questions prepared to assist students with their preparation, can be found in Appendices D, E and F.

The 'Bill' was discussed by primary students in the Legislative Council Chamber, and secondary students in the Legislative Assembly Chamber. One student from each school delegation delivered a three-minute statement on each of their school's allocated clauses. Students were also given the opportunity to move amendments to any clause in the 'Bill', and to answer questions from Committee members in the course of the hearing. A vote was taken on each amendment and each clause, and on the 'Bill' in its entirety at the conclusion of the discussion. This provided students with a range of opportunities to make their views heard throughout the day, and ensured a richness of discussion across all major issues covered by the inquiry.

Additional Aspects of the Hearing

The program for the hearing included a morning briefing session, as well as morning tea and lunch for all participants and their supervising teachers/parents. During these times, students had the opportunity to speak with Committee members and parliamentary officers, as well as to explore Parliament House and further their knowledge of Parliament and its activities. The morning briefing session included instruction on rules and procedures for conduct within the chambers, which were adapted from the rules applied to Members of Parliament on normal sitting days. Students in both chambers were expected to adhere to these rules throughout the hearing.

At the end of the hearing, students in each chamber participated in a mock 'Adjournment Debate'. Each school was invited to deliver a 90-second statement on any issue of importance to their school community that they wished to bring to the attention of the relevant minister. While this aspect of the hearing did not contribute directly to the inquiry, it served to enhance students' understanding of Victorian parliamentary processes and provided them with a unique opportunity to articulate their communities' concerns. The Committee sent transcripts of these statements to the relevant ministers for their response.

Outcomes

The hearing gave the Committee an unparalleled opportunity to obtain evidence from a diverse group of students from Victorian government schools. The Committee was impressed with the outstanding quality of students' contributions throughout the day and gained a substantial amount of valuable evidence for the inquiry. Feedback on the hearing from students and teachers in participating schools suggests that the hearing's second objective was also fulfilled, and that all participants found the event to be an engaging and worthwhile learning experience.

Survey of School Principals

From July to September 2007, the Committee conducted an online survey of a sample of Victorian school principals. The survey sought data on current school uniform policies and practices, based on the issues and trends that had been identified in the literature review, written submissions and public hearings. It also collected basic information about each school, to assist with identifying any potential demographic differences. A sample of the online survey form can be found in Appendix G.

Sampling

The Committee wanted to obtain statistically valid data for schools in each sector (Catholic, government and independent) and level (primary, secondary, primary/secondary and special) in Victoria. Minimum sample sizes for each variable were determined using a p-value of 0.5, a t-value of 1.65 and a 95 per cent confidence level.¹ Sample sizes were then increased to allow for a non-response rate of 30 per cent. Table 1.1 shows the total number of each type of school in Victoria, the total sample size and the actual number of responses received.

Table 1.1: Sample of schools for Education and Training Committee *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*

	<i>Number of Victorian schools</i>	<i>Number sampled</i>	<i>Number responded</i>	<i>Response rate</i>
BY SECTOR				
Catholic	484	224	182	81%
Government	1594	326	274	84%
Independent	218	160	127	79%
BY LEVEL				
Primary	1636	287	230	80%
Primary and secondary	195	141	124	88%
Secondary	365	193	175	91%
Special/language	100	89	54	61%
TOTAL SAMPLE				
Total	2296	710	583	82%

Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Due to the requirement to obtain a statistically valid sample size for all variables, the percentages of each type of school in the sample is not proportional to the total population of Victorian schools. After the sample size was determined, schools were identified using a multistage random sample from a complete list of Victorian schools provided by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Distribution and Collection

Sample schools were initially informed about the survey through formal correspondence from the Committee Chair. However, an online survey program was chosen to maximise cost-effectiveness in data collection. A link to the online survey form was emailed to sample schools on 19 July 2007, with two follow-up emails sent to non-responding schools. The email included an option to opt out of the survey, which only two schools followed. Schools were also able to request the survey in hard copy format, to eliminate bias against those experiencing difficulties with the online program. Hard copy surveys were received from 34 schools.

¹ Figures obtained using National Statistical Service *Sample Size Calculator*, available at National Statistical Service website, <<http://www.nss.gov.au/nss/home.NSF/>>.

The survey received 583 complete responses, representing a total response rate of 82 per cent. This included the minimum sample sizes required for statistical validity from primary, secondary, primary and secondary, and special schools; and schools from the Catholic, government and independent sectors. The survey was closed on 7 September 2007, when all required sample sizes had been attained.

Analysis of Survey Data

Data collected through the survey was downloaded from the online program and analysed in detail by the Committee across the two key variables of school sector and level of schooling. A number of additional variables were also investigated, including differences between schools in regional and metropolitan locations and any trends relating to the gender or socioeconomic background of student populations. The results of this analysis are presented throughout this report.

Analysis of School Uniform Policies and Price Lists

The Committee obtained dress code and school uniform policies and price lists from a sample of 65 Victorian schools. The initial sample comprised 30 primary schools and 30 secondary schools, with equal representation from each sector in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. The schools were selected randomly, from a full list of Victorian schools supplied by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Where a single-sex school was included in the random sample, the next qualifying school was also included in the sample (ie either a single-sex school of the opposite gender or a co-educational school where only data for the relevant gender were examined). Similarly, if a school in the initial sample did not have either a compulsory or optional school uniform, a replacement school was selected. In total, the Committee examined policies from 65 Victorian schools, in order to obtain its sample of 60 girls and 60 boys school uniform policies and price lists.

The policies and price lists were analysed in detail to ascertain which garments are required components of the school uniform for boys and girls at each school in the sample, and the cost of each of those garments.

Definitions

'Dress code' is the term used by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to refer to any 'detailed written statement of the expectations that a school council holds regarding student appearance'. The Department goes on to define a student dress code as follows:

A dress code may require students to wear a school uniform and may define specifications for garment design and colour. Alternatively, a dress code may merely set out broad guidelines as to the appearance of students.²

Other education departments throughout Australia also use the term 'dress code', or similar terms such as 'dress requirements' (WA) or 'uniform requirements' (NSW). For the purposes of this inquiry, two terms have been adopted: dress code and school uniform policy.

The Committee notes that 'uniform policy' and 'dress code' are frequently used interchangeably by Victorian schools. However, the two terms have been differentiated in this inquiry, to better distinguish school policies that require or identify specific student clothing from policies that make more general rules relating to student appearance and attire.

² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

School Uniform Policy

For the purposes of this inquiry, a **school uniform policy** is taken to mean any policy made by a school which sets out the characteristics of a compulsory or non-compulsory school uniform. The school uniform policy may include requirements or recommendations relating to:

- 1) the specific garments to be worn;
- 2) how the garments are to be worn, such as tucking in shirts or hem length for dresses;
- 3) when the garments are to be worn and by whom, such as uniforms for different seasons or year levels;
- 4) processes, prices and outlets for purchasing school uniform items;
- 5) exemption processes;
- 6) enforcement processes;
- 7) regulations relating to non-clothing aspects of student appearance, such as hair length or jewellery;
- 8) any special considerations relating to student attire in the school, such as SunSmart or religious requirements; and/or
- 9) review processes.

Dress Code

For the purposes of this inquiry, a **dress code** is taken to mean any policy made by a school which sets out requirements relating to student clothing or appearance which do *not* include a specific school uniform. A dress code will typically include only items 6 to 9 from the above list.

Chapter 2:

Current Policies and Practices



Introduction

It is an important issue and it is something that school communities are very passionate about...They are as passionate about having a uniform as not having a uniform.³

One of the fundamental questions raised in this inquiry was whether uniforms should be compulsory in Victorian schools. Staff, parents and students from schools with uniforms spoke proudly of the advantages of their uniform for all members of their school communities. While schools without uniforms constitute a much smaller proportion of Victorian schools, the Committee found that their school communities are no less passionate in supporting their approach to student dress and appearance. This chapter outlines the diversity of views on school uniforms across governments and school communities in Australia, followed by an overview of current dress codes and school uniform policies and practices in Victorian schools.

Victorian Policy Context

Government Schools

In Victoria, all school councils have the authority to create and implement dress codes and school uniform policies for their students. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development outlines its policy on student dress codes for government schools in the *Schools Reference Guide*, a comprehensive resource document compiled to assist schools in all aspects of governance, management and administration.⁴ The policy includes a number of recommendations for schools to apply in establishing dress codes and uniform policies, in consultation with the school community.

The Department's recommendations do not indicate a preference as to whether schools should have uniforms or not. The Department recommends that in establishing a dress code, schools should recognise 'the positive role of clothing in promoting a sense of individual and collective pride in students, and promoting their identification with the school'.⁵ It does not, however, specify whether 'clothing' necessarily refers to having a school uniform. The Department also suggests that school councils give consideration to the following issues with respect to their dress code:

- Does it respect the cultural norms of the school community?
- Is it reasonable by contemporary standards and does it avoid unnecessarily intruding on a student's rights in matters of personal appearance?
- Is it suitable to the role of being a student and to the tasks and functions performed in that role?
- Have appropriate health and safety considerations been considered?
- Are any gender-specific requirements of the code in accordance with community standards?

³ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.8.

⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁵ *ibid.*

'Our college community strongly believes that student uniform is a very important element in the development of student culture, expectations and values. We would vehemently oppose any proposal to take away the right of government college communities to determine their own uniform requirements.'

Committee Survey

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

- Does it make some provision for individual expression through alternatives within overall garment requirements?
- Has it been made clear to parents/guardians and students prior to enrolment, thereby providing a basis of assent?
- Is it able to be met by all students?
- Will it be reviewed when circumstances change significantly?⁶

The *Schools Reference Guide* encourages school councils to give careful consideration to the consultative process that will be undertaken with the school community in developing a dress code. It also provides general advice about aspects of the dress code's implementation, including: grounds for exemption required by law; appropriate measures for school uniform enforcement; and advice regarding the minimisation of risk in purchasing arrangements with school uniform suppliers.⁷

The Committee believes that the Department's guidelines are an important resource for schools. For many schools, the dress code or school uniform policy may be considered a relatively minor aspect of school administration. The departmental guidelines both ensure that schools are aware of the important issues that need to be addressed in their dress codes and uniform policies and save schools time in researching these issues themselves. The Committee hopes that enhancements to these valuable guidelines will be one of the key outcomes of this inquiry.

Catholic Schools

Requirements for dress codes and school uniforms in the Catholic school sector are determined by local school authorities within each of the four dioceses. In its written submission, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria summarised the views of three of the four dioceses with respect to school uniforms.⁸

The Dioceses of Melbourne and Ballarat share the view that school uniforms and procedures to enforce them are the responsibility of individual schools. The submission notes that in the views of these dioceses, 'schools can be trusted to identify and implement a uniform policy that suits their culture/community'.⁹ The Diocese of Sandhurst notes that 'Mandatory school uniform policies enjoy widespread support within the diocese'.¹⁰ The submission does not include a statement from the Diocese of Sale.

Independent Schools

Dress codes and school uniform policies in independent schools are determined by individual schools and their communities. The independent sector includes a very broad range of schools, including those with specific religious or philosophical perspectives and, as Mrs Sayers, Board Member, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, noted, 'one size definitely does not fit all'.¹¹ Entrusting school uniform choices to individual schools also reflects the independent sector's core values of choice, diversity and autonomy.¹²

Mrs Sayers told the Committee that because dress codes and school uniforms are governed at a school level, these issues have not been discussed 'at board level'.¹³ However, the Association often provides advice to schools in response to

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁹ *ibid.*, p.1.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.2.

¹¹ Mrs E. Sayers, Board Member, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.32.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*, p.33.

queries about uniform policies, especially relating to compliance with relevant legislation. The Association also disseminates information to schools about any special guidelines that may exist for uniform policies, such as SunSmart options, or refers schools to the appropriate agencies.

Other Australian Jurisdictions

Currently, the Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia to have a compulsory school uniform policy for government schools. On 25 July 2006, the NT Minister for Education announced a proposal for compulsory school uniforms for all preparatory to year 9 students (optional for senior students), to take effect from 2008. The policy is intended to minimise clothing cost burdens for parents, promote a positive image for schools and eliminate pressure on students to keep up with the latest fashion brands and trends.¹⁴

Under the Northern Territory policy, each government school will develop a school uniform implementation plan in conjunction with parents and school councils. Plans must contain the following elements:

- a) a requirement that students wear an authorised school uniform;
- b) measures to address exceptional circumstances where a student is unable to comply; and
- c) measures to address health and safety considerations including sun protection, appropriate footwear and hats.¹⁵

As part of their implementation plans, schools must also develop guidelines regarding:

- what constitutes the school uniform for the school;
- measures to encourage student compliance with the uniform policy (which must not extend to any student being precluded from attending school);
- a communications plan with details on providing information to and incorporating feedback from the school community;
- mechanisms to review the school uniform over time; and
- measures to deal with students not wearing the uniform.¹⁶

In June 2007, four members of the Committee met with key representatives of the NT education community in Darwin, including the then Minister for Education, Hon Paul Henderson MLA (refer Appendix C). During their investigations, members of the Committee were advised that schools are approaching the implementation plans in very different ways. Interpretations range from general requirements allowing free choice of garments within specified colour schemes, to more prescriptive and traditional approaches. Even in mandating a compulsory school uniform, the Department has thus left ample scope for schools to implement the school uniform policy in the way that is most appropriate to their community.

The Committee found that other Australian jurisdictions have recently considered introducing compulsory school uniforms. In 2004, the then WA Education Minister Hon Alan Carpenter MLA, planned to make uniforms compulsory in Western Australian schools by 2006. However, this met with opposition from school and student bodies.¹⁷ In 2006, the ACT Department of Education and Training called for opinions on the proposed introduction of compulsory school uniforms,¹⁸ but has since continued to leave the decision whether to have a uniform to school

¹⁴ Department of Employment, Education and Training 2007 (Northern Territory), *Policy SM-01.7: Compulsory School Uniforms T-9*, July 2007, DEET, Darwin, p.1.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁷ ABC News, 'School uniform plan draws criticism', 17 November 2004, Australian Broadcasting Corporation website, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2004/11/17/1245168.htm>>, accessed on 7 November 2007.

¹⁸ Mr J. Stanhope MLA, Chief Minister, Australian Capital Territory, 'Minister Calls For Community Discussion on School Uniform Policy', *Media Release*, 15 February 2005.

communities.¹⁹ In Queensland, consultation for the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*, which provides for schools to determine their own uniform policies, also included consultation around whether compulsory uniforms should be introduced.²⁰ Despite the attention the issue has received, no other jurisdiction has yet followed the Northern Territory in making school uniforms compulsory.

While most Australian jurisdictions leave it to schools and their communities to decide whether or not to have a school uniform, education departments have articulated their position on the issue in a variety of ways. Tasmania's policy statement, for example, explicitly states that wearing a school uniform is 'strongly encouraged'.²¹ The opening pages of the NSW and WA education departments' school uniform policy statements also seek to convince schools to adopt uniforms by listing the ways in which wearing a uniform will assist school communities.²²

Conversely, the SA Department of Education and Children's Services opens its school uniform policy by listing a range of options available to schools, including both uniform and uniform-free approaches.²³ Similarly, the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts explains in its policy statement that student dress codes 'may or may not include a school uniform'.²⁴ As in Victoria, these education departments indicate a neutral position on the benefits of uniforms for school students. The Committee did not find any jurisdiction in Australia that indicated a preference in its policies for not having school uniforms.

Most Australian jurisdictions accompany their policy statements with guidelines to help schools develop dress codes and uniform policies in consultation with their communities. Currently, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory are the only jurisdictions that do not have guidelines available for dress codes and school uniforms, although relevant issues may be covered in other departmental policies, such as the Australian Capital Territory's school Sun Protection policy.²⁵ Queensland is the only jurisdiction in which detailed guidelines around school uniform policies have been legislated.²⁶

Table 2.1 offers a brief comparison of the departmental position on school uniforms in each state and territory.

¹⁹ Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory), Written Submission, June 2007, p.1

²⁰ Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland), Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

²¹ Department of Education (Tasmania) website, <<http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/parents/general/costs/uniforms>>, accessed on 11 September 2007.

²² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniforms in New South Wales Government Schools*, DET, Sydney; Department of Education and Training (Western Australia) 2007, *Dress requirements for students in WA public schools*, Government of Western Australia, East Perth.

²³ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) 2007, *Administrative Instructions and Guidelines*, May 2007, DECS, Adelaide.

²⁴ Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland) 2007, *Policy SMS-PR-022: Student Dress Code*, November 2007, DETA, Brisbane.

²⁵ Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory) 2006, *Sun Protection Policy*, DET, Canberra.

²⁶ *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (Queensland).

Table 2.1: Comparison of approaches to school uniform policies across Australia

State/Territory	Position on uniforms	Guidance provided for schools
Australian Capital Territory	Uniforms supported	No guidelines
New South Wales	Uniforms supported	Guidelines provided
Northern Territory	Uniforms compulsory	Guidelines provided
Queensland	Neutral	Guidelines and legislation
South Australia	Neutral	Guidelines provided
Tasmania	Uniforms supported	No guidelines
Victoria	Neutral	Guidelines provided
Western Australia	Uniforms supported	Guidelines provided

Source: Compiled by the Education and Training Committee, 2007.

Enforcement of school uniform policies is the area where most states and territories provide the strongest guidance. All jurisdictions that provide guidelines place limitations on the sanctions principals can apply for breaches of dress codes or school uniform policies. While the exact wording varies, the common intent is that sanctions which exclude students from learning, including suspension and expulsion, are prohibited. Western Australia and Queensland add that sanctions which may damage a student's career prospects, such as negative comments in school reports, are not permitted.²⁷ In general, education departments throughout Australia encourage schools to seek compliance with school uniform policies through 'positive reinforcement', not punishment.

Most government policies also provide guidance regarding the laws, policies and regulations that schools need to consider in developing a dress code or school uniform policy. Typically, these include anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation and laws, policies and regulations relating to health and safety. While some states, including Victoria, provide an overview of how these laws might apply to school uniform policies, others, such as Queensland and South Australia, simply provide a list of relevant legislation.

Communication and consultation with school communities are further areas in which most education departments provide some guidance. Guidelines relating to consultation typically seek to ensure that a wide variety of stakeholder groups within the school community are given a say in the development and review of a school uniform policy. New South Wales and Queensland also require that school uniform policies are actively communicated to parents and readily available to be viewed at any time.

Some departmental guidelines for school uniforms also provide advice regarding costs and purchasing arrangements. In Western Australia, for example, schools are asked to ensure that the cost of the uniform is 'within reasonable limits'.²⁸ The South Australian guidelines make explicit reference to poverty as a common reason for not having a dress code and urge schools to be sensitive to the needs of disadvantaged students in providing financial support or exemptions.²⁹ Some

²⁷ Department of Education and Training (Western Australia), Written Submission, May 2007, p.2; Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland) 2007, *Policy SMS-PR-022: Student Dress Code*, November 2007.

²⁸ Department of Education and Training (Western Australia) 2007, *Dress requirements for students in WA public schools*, Government of Western Australia, East Perth, p.2.

²⁹ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) 2007, *Administrative Instructions and Guidelines*, May 2007, DECS, Adelaide, p.107.

'The wearing of school uniform has a positive influence on how the community perceives the College and is certainly one of the first things that is noticed by a visitor. If worn well and properly policed it helps to promote a positive image of not only the students but also the school.'

Lyndhurst Secondary
College

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

states, including South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland, require schools to comply with specific guidelines and regulations relating to government purchasing.

Most departmental policy statements also provide advice to help schools cope with diversity in their student populations, including grounds on which certain students may be exempted from compliance with uniform policies. Permissible grounds for exemption typically include ethnic or religious background and physical disabilities or health conditions. In South Australia, specific mention is made of additional groups in the student body who may require special consideration, including adult and itinerant students.³⁰

Education departments throughout Australia therefore show consensus, in general terms, about the areas in which schools require guidance with respect to dress codes and uniform policies. However, they vary considerably in their priorities and prescriptiveness. While the Committee has not identified any one uniform policy in Australia as exemplary or fully comprehensive, it has noted worthwhile elements across the range of government policy documents within Australia.

To Have a School Uniform or Not?

Victorian schools are charged with the responsibility of determining a dress code or school uniform policy that will reflect the needs and preferences of their particular community. In doing so, schools must assess the pros and cons of the available options, beginning with the decision whether to have a uniform or not. The key arguments relating to the potential benefits of school uniforms raised in evidence to this inquiry, together with one of the many examples to support each argument, are outlined below.

Benefits of Having a School Uniform

- engenders a sense of pride and belonging in the school
The cultural impact and sense of pride in one's school cannot be overlooked. Also, the kids look good and they know it.³¹
- creates an atmosphere conducive to learning
As a teacher with over 20 years experience, I have found that a pupil, correctly wearing a school uniform (ie shirt tucked in etc) in a school that enforces this code, 'somehow' is much more attentive to their school work, more polite and courteous to teachers and fellow students.³²
- reduces competition between students, and bullying on the basis of clothing
It offers less opportunity for bullying, in the sense that everybody looks the same, so there is none of the, 'We look better than you and therefore we're better than you.'³³
- all students feel equal
The school uniform is a good way of making students feel equal to their peers, they don't have to worry about having the best jeans or shoes, all students can come to school feeling comfortable that everyone wears the same outfit.³⁴
- reduces the need for parents to buy expensive clothing
Children request fashion and surf brands etc where there is a choice of clothing and this comes at a high price tag.³⁵

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Principal, quoted by Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.3.

³² Mr P. Moore, Teacher, Written Submission, March 2007, p.1.

³³ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.2.

³⁴ Heywood and District Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

³⁵ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

- **eliminates dilemmas about what to wear to school**

It helps present a positive image to the community and in preventing students from being subjected to peer pressure about what they and the potential stress of choosing new clothes everyday.³⁶
- **offers quality, durable clothing to parents at reasonable costs**

The provision of a college uniform makes it cheaper for parents to provide appropriate and durable clothing for their children to wear to school.³⁷
- **encourages students to attend to personal presentation**

School uniforms engender a sense of respect for self. They set a tone amongst students and in wearing them they reflect a sense of pride in one's own appearance, of being organised and self-disciplined in preparations for the school day.³⁸
- **makes students easier to identify at school and on excursions**

It makes it easier to identify genuine students, as well as those are who not part of the community, and thus to protect the students from undesirable influences.³⁹
- **attracts enrolments to the school**

It is evident, schools are using their image as part of their strategic marketing campaigns to attract new students. Given parents have a choice in deciding where to send their children to school...uniforms and the overall presentation of the schools have become integral to making their final decisions.⁴⁰
- **ensures students are dressed safely and appropriately for school activities**

A compulsory dress code means there is a way of ensuring students come dressed appropriately and practically for the activities they undertake during the day.⁴¹
- **helps students prepare for employment.**

Adherence with school uniform policy reflects possible future workplace expectations and reinforces positive behaviour.⁴²

Benefits of Not Having a School Uniform

- **empowers students to make choices and take responsibility**

It promotes the development of personal responsibility because students choose what they wear, rather than have a uniform enforced upon them [and] contributes to the creative space necessary for children to develop to their full potential.⁴³
- **lets students express their individuality**

It is about letting children develop as individuals, about children learning that not everyone dresses the same, that not everyone thinks the same. They need to express themselves in many ways, through hairstyles and colour, body piercing and body art, music and clothes.⁴⁴
- **supports inclusion by encouraging diversity**

The absolute diversity and range of student styles, the number of sub-cultures that co-exist peacefully seems to allow virtually all students to find a niche.⁴⁵
- **creates a vibrant and colourful school environment**

³⁶ Victorian Student Representative Council, Written Submission, June 2007, pp.1-2.

³⁷ Lyndale Secondary College Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³⁸ Heywood and District Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

³⁹ Lyndale Secondary College Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴⁰ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴¹ Hampton Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴² Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴³ Ms M. Pledger, Representative, Parent Association, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.4.

⁴⁴ Ms M. A. Rosenthal, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴⁵ Sandringham College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

I think our school is filled with bright, colourful, imaginative young things and some of them express their personalities with an amazing dress sense, but you know most of them wear sensible, comfortable clothes and shoes because what you wear is not who you are...⁴⁶

- teaches students not to make judgements on the basis of clothing

...you do not need a uniform to take pride in your school because students should not be judged on their appearance but on their behaviour and their choices.⁴⁷
- eliminates the need for parents to buy expensive school uniforms

... school uniforms in primary school are usually more expensive than a similar item bought without a school logo; you tend to go through a number of tops and pants, particularly with boys, as they tend to be destroyed fairly quickly. Those that aren't, are grown out of just as fast.⁴⁸
- removes the need to spend teacher time on enforcement of a school uniform

Having no uniform generally allows the teachers to concentrate on other more important issues rather than whether a particular student is wearing the correct colour socks or shirt.⁴⁹
- improves teacher–student relationships

The School strongly fosters a culture of cooperative education that respects diversity of all kinds, encourages a harmonious relationship between teachers and students to be established and maintained throughout all grades, and cultivates self-discipline and responsibility in students.⁵⁰
- improves student engagement with school

No uniform takes away one of the biggest reasons students have to hate school.⁵¹
- supports a student-centred school environment

...uniform reduces an emphasis on differentiated learning and customising curriculum because it values uniformity. It gives adults an excuse to overlook the individual and their needs for a differentiated learning program.⁵²

The Committee commends contributors on both sides of the debate for the strength and sincerity of their arguments. It is clear to the Committee that the vast majority of Victorian schools, whether they have a uniform or not, have based their decision on reasoned consideration of what they feel is best for their school community. It is therefore the Committee's view that it would not be appropriate to expect Victorian schools to conform to a compulsory school uniform policy.

Recommendation 2.1: That decisions regarding dress codes and school uniform policies remain the responsibility of school councils, in consultation with their communities.

Types of Dress Codes and School Uniform Policies

Developing a dress code or school uniform policy does not stop with the decision about whether or not a uniform is to be worn. One of the key findings of the inquiry was the enormous variation between schools as to what it means to have, or not to have, a uniform. For some schools, a school uniform refers to garments that may be chosen by the student, as long as they conform to school colours. Other schools permit a wide range of student choice for most items, but also require some specific garments carrying the school logo. For schools with more stringent

⁴⁶ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.7.

⁴⁷ Ms A. Richardson, Year 6 Student, Spensley Street Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.7.

⁴⁸ Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.1.

⁵⁰ Merri Creek Primary School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁵¹ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.8.

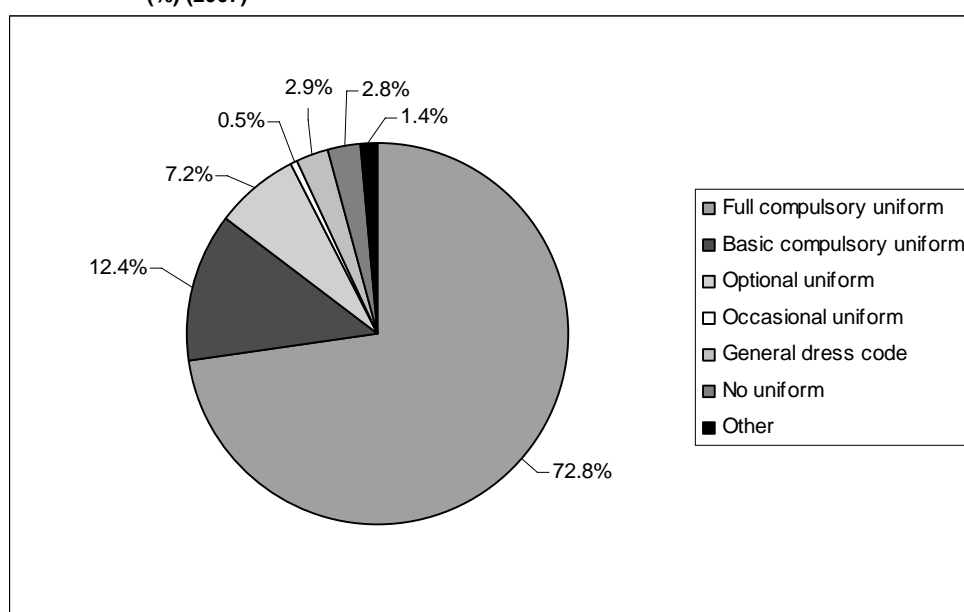
⁵² Dr D. Warner, Principal, Eltham College of Education, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

school uniform policies, all students are required to wear a complete set of specified garments, many of which are badged with the school logo. A large number of schools, especially in the primary sector, have optional school uniforms available to their students.

Figure 2.1 shows the types of uniform policies in Victorian schools, as represented in data from the Committee's survey. Full compulsory uniforms are by far the most common type of policy (72.8%), followed by a basic compulsory uniform with limited specifications such as school colours or some items with the school logo (12.4%) and an optional uniform (7.2%). Only 5.7 per cent of schools have no uniform or a general dress code only.⁵³

Of the schools which ticked 'Other', all but two did so because they have a compulsory uniform for some year levels in the school, but no uniform for senior students. The remaining schools were a technical college (which indicated that its only clothing regulation is for safety equipment to be worn in workshops) and a school that only requires students to wear a uniform during excursions.⁵⁴

Figure 2.1: Types of student dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

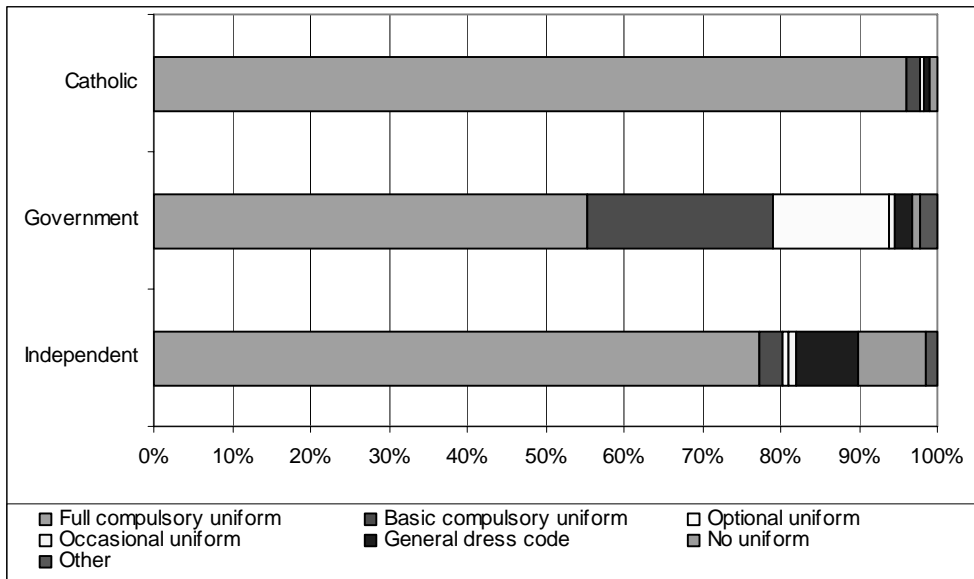
Figure 2.2 shows the different types of dress codes and school uniform policies across the Catholic, government and independent sectors. Full compulsory uniforms are in place in nearly all Victorian Catholic schools (96.1%) and are least common in government schools (55.3%). However, nearly one quarter of government schools (23.8%) have a basic compulsory uniform (limited specifications for clothing, such as wearing schools colours or some items with a school logo) and many others have an optional uniform that students can choose to wear (14.7%). The proportion of students choosing to wear a uniform in schools where it is optional to do so varies greatly; in some instances, nearly all students choose to wear the optional uniform and in other examples, very few students choose to do so. Independent schools have the highest proportion of schools with general dress codes, or no uniform.⁵⁵

⁵³ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

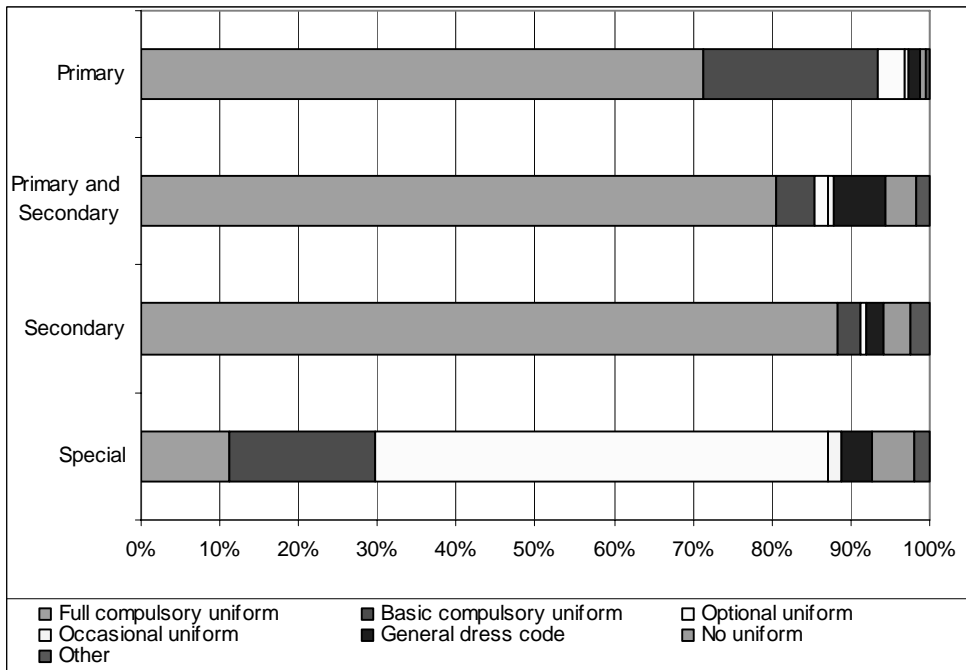
Figure 2.2: Types of student dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Figure 2.3 shows the different types of dress codes and uniform policies across the different levels of Victorian schools: primary, secondary, primary and secondary, and special schools. The differences are less marked between the levels than between the sectors, but there is nevertheless a clear increase in the proportion of schools with a compulsory uniform, as the age of the students increases. Special schools are by far the least likely to have compulsory uniforms, but the majority do have a uniform available, often on an optional basis.⁵⁶

Figure 2.3: Types of student dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools, by level (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

The survey also revealed a correlation between the type of school uniform policy and the socioeconomic background of students. Schools with high numbers of students receiving the Educational Maintenance Allowance are the least likely to have compulsory uniforms. The Committee found no significant differences between the types of dress codes and uniform policies adopted by regional and metropolitan schools.⁵⁷

Characteristics of Dress Codes and School Uniform Policies

In developing a uniform policy, schools must determine a number of general requirements. These relate to what the uniform comprises; when it should be worn; how it should be worn; who should wear it; and any requirements relating to aspects of student appearance other than clothing. The Committee found wide variations across all of these elements.

What to Wear

Typically, the most significant purpose of any school uniform policy is setting out what students are required to wear. Table 2.2 lists the types of garments that are currently included in Victorian school uniforms, based on the Committee's analysis of a sample of 60 school uniform policies.⁵⁸ The sample identified a wide range of compulsory and optional combinations of the items shown below.

Table 2.2: Garments and other items included in Victorian school uniforms

Beanie	Jacket	School bag	Sports socks
Belt	Jumper	Shirt	Spray jacket
Blazer	Kilt	Shoes	Sun protective hat
Blouse	Lab coat/goggles	Shorts	Swimwear
Bomber jacket	Mouthguard	Skirt	Tie
Cap	Netball skirt	Skivvy	Tights
Craft/Technology apron	Pinafore	'Skort'	Trackpants
Culottes	Polar fleece jacket	Socks	Trousers
Dress	Polo shirt	Sports bag	T-shirt
Dress hat	Raincoat	Sports cap/hat	Vest
Gloves	Rugby top	Sports jacket	Windcheater
Hair accessories	Runners	Sports jumper	Winter jacket
Iron-on emblem	Scarf	Sports shorts	

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

As Table 2.2 demonstrates, today's school uniforms include a broad range of formal and non-traditional garments and accessories. The Committee heard mixed opinions as to whether a 'traditional' or less formal design is preferable. In the Committee's survey, one principal commented that the introduction of a more formal uniform transformed the culture of the school:

We moved to a more formal uniform code from a basic one. The tone of the school lifted, attitudes from staff, parents and students improved. It had an amazing uplifting effect.⁵⁹

Western Australia is the only Australian jurisdiction in which an opinion on the design of school uniforms is expressed in departmental policy. In opening the

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

⁵⁹ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

'Catholic primary schools, by and large, don't seem to have huge issues over uniform. They are neat, functional and provide a strong sense of school identity. Catholic schools in other states have some pretty fancy uniforms. The Victorian schools are more functional than dressy which I think is a good thing.'

Committee Survey

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Department of Education and Training's policy statement on school dress requirements, Minister for Education and Training, Hon Mark McGowan MLA, urges government schools to choose traditional styles of uniform to uphold their reputations:

Traditional styles of uniform will play an important part in keeping up the strong reputation of public schools and ensuring parents continue to send their children to public schools.⁶⁰

On the other hand, Victorian schools with less formal uniforms proudly defended their decision. In a public hearing, one primary school student told the Committee that her school's decision to choose a 'non-traditional uniform' is supported by parents and students as modern, economical, and convenient.⁶¹ In a written submission, year 10 students from Braybrook College also supported their school's current uniform design:

If we get blazers and ties, we will become like a private school. We don't think we should try and be something we're not.⁶²

The sample of Victorian school uniform policies examined by the Committee confirmed that more traditional uniform items, including blazers and ties, are currently most commonly associated with independent and Catholic schools.⁶³

The Committee also found variations in policies and practices in schools that have a general dress code. Some dress codes include broad requirements, such as 'neat and tidy' or 'nothing offensive'.⁶⁴ Some dress codes make statements about fashion and branding, such as 'clothing without aggressive images or expensive fashionable labels'⁶⁵ or clothing without 'brands, slogans or company symbols'.⁶⁶ Other dress codes ban specific items of clothing, such as thongs.⁶⁷ Like school uniform policies, dress codes generally reflect the values of the school community. The link between values and school uniforms is particularly apparent in independent schools founded on a particular philosophy or belief system. In accordance with the specific aesthetic of the Steiner movement, for example, Little Yarra Steiner School specifies light, bright colours, natural fibres and no designs/logos larger than what can be covered by a hand.⁶⁸ Religious schools also often use their school dress code as a means of promoting the specific dress standards of their religion or culture.

The Committee believes that every school has a unique set of values and beliefs that will guide the selection of a school uniform, although they will not always be as clearly articulated as in the above examples. When 125 Victorian students gathered at Parliament House for a public hearing for this inquiry, the Committee was pleased to observe the diversity in student appearance. The Committee was also impressed by the pride with which all students represented their school in their attire, whatever type of dress code or uniform policy they were following. The Committee therefore supports the Victorian Department of Education and Early

⁶⁰ Department of Education and Training (Western Australia) 2007, *Dress requirements for students in WA public schools*, Government of Western Australia, East Perth.

⁶¹ Ms H. Lessing, Year 6 Student, Benalla Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.18.

⁶² Students of 10C English, Braybrook College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

⁶³ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

⁶⁴ Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁶⁵ Cockatoo Montessori School website, <<http://cockatoomontessori.vic.edu.au>>, accessed on 26 November 2007.

⁶⁶ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁶⁷ Croydon Community School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁶⁸ Little Yarra Steiner School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

Childhood Development's guidelines, in saying that a dress code or school uniform should 'reflect the values of its particular school community'.⁶⁹

How and When it Should be Worn

A school uniform policy may also set rules relating to how a garment should be worn. As one parent noted on Parents Victoria's online discussion forum, simply prescribing school uniform items is not sufficient to ensure compliance:

Students are notorious for corrupting uniform...having a compulsory one does not ensure that it will be worn correctly.⁷⁰

Common examples of regulations relating to how a uniform is worn include shirts being tucked in, skirts being a prescribed length, or torn clothing being mended or replaced.

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines advise schools about the times at which a dress code or uniform policy is likely to apply:

The code usually applies during school hours, while travelling to and from school, and when students are engaged in school activities out of school hours.⁷¹

The Committee nevertheless found substantial variation in the actual application of school uniform policies, both in government and non-government schools. For example, the Committee is aware of two schools in which uniforms are only compulsory for students representing the school on excursions.⁷²

It is also very common for schools to have different uniforms for summer and winter. For some schools, the dates on which these uniforms must be worn are fixed. For others, the summer and winter uniforms simply provide a wider range of options, allowing students to choose the clothing that is most comfortable at any time of year.

Who Should Wear it

Schools must also determine to whom their dress code or school uniform policy applies. In some schools, uniforms apply only to students at certain year levels. The Committee's survey found six schools that exempt senior secondary students from wearing uniforms and one P-12 school in which the uniform is only compulsory after Year 5. For some schools, all students are required to wear the uniform throughout their schooling, but the design changes as students move through the year levels.⁷³

A particularly contentious issue raised in the inquiry was whether dress codes and school uniform policies should also apply to teachers and other school staff. The Committee's survey found that 43.8 per cent of Victorian schools have some form of written dress code for their staff, either setting out general or specific standards of dress. A small number of schools even have specific uniforms that their staff are required to wear. In many other schools (43.6%), staff dress codes are 'implicit'; that is, staff are expected to conform to certain standards in their attire, but these standards are not documented.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁷⁰ Ms B. Mackay, 'Should school uniforms be compulsory?', *Parents Victoria online forum*, 10 September 2007, Parents Victoria website, <<http://www.cybertext.net.au/pv/discussion.htm>>.

⁷¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

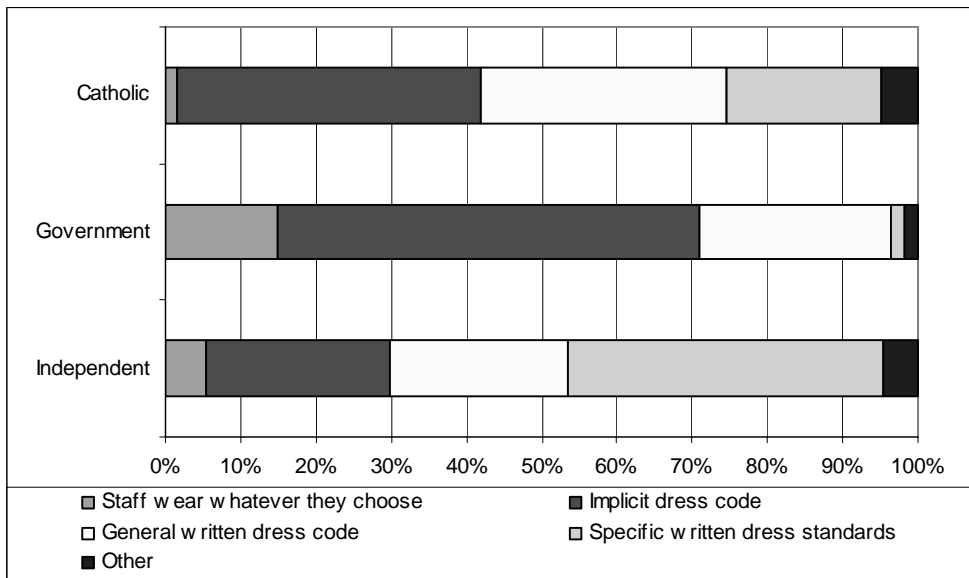
⁷² Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

The Committee found that staff dress codes vary across the Catholic, government and independent sectors (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Types of staff dress codes in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Independent (65.3%) and Catholic schools (53.0%) are more likely than government schools (27.1%) to have written dress codes for staff. These codes are most specific in independent schools. No significant differences were found between staff dress codes across primary and secondary schools, regional and metropolitan schools, or schools with students from higher and lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The following comments from the Committee’s survey give some indication of the diversity of approaches taken by schools to staff dress codes:

Currently our teachers have the option to purchase school jackets or polo shirts, but that is not compulsory. All teachers are provided with a badge with the school number in navy and gold for easy identification.

It is specified that we do not wear jeans and that male teachers are encouraged to wear a shirt and tie. If this is not comfortable they are requested to wear shirt and tie for specific occasions....We have discussed professional dress as a staff, and have decided that clothing for women needs to be modest - no low tops, nor skin obvious between pants and tops.

We have only introduced a polo jacket with the school logo this week...I would love to have a fitted suit or uniform for staff however find it hard to get agreement.

It is not as yet written but staff have chosen to wear a professional uniform that complements school colours, and this has been well accepted by the school community.⁷⁵

One comment in the survey provided an example of staff dress standards in an Islamic school:

We provide the staff with an Abaya [garment covering the whole body except face, feet and hands], to wear on top of their clothes.⁷⁶

Another school in the survey did not see the need for staff dress standards at all:

Our staff do not have a dress code, it is not something that we require, they all come to work appropriately dressed.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

The idea of a dress code or uniform policy for teachers received mixed reactions from the students who gave evidence to this inquiry. While some students felt that it was 'about time' teachers were made to adhere to a dress code, others supported the view that teachers are already maintaining appropriate standards in their clothing.⁷⁸ For Ms Morgan Pumpa, Year 10 Student, Collingwood College, self-expression through clothing is just as important for teachers as it is for students:

I think teachers at Collingwood College are just as bold as students in the way they dress. They are just as great as the students at expressing their opinions.⁷⁹

The Committee observed that like student dress codes, policies for staff dress tend to reflect the particular set of values of the school community.

Four principals commented in the Committee's survey that they would like to see clearer guidelines about what teaching staff can wear at school. In a written submission, Mr John Gow, Principal, Mont Albert School, described the specific issues he has dealt with regarding appropriate clothing for teaching staff:

This year already I have had to suggest to female teachers that I don't believe singlet tops and thongs are professional dress. To males I have had to suggest that beach shorts, sandals and collarless t-shirts are not professional dress.⁸⁰

In the survey, one principal noted an apparent decline in standards of staff presentation and the difficulty that principals face in confronting staff about their attire:

It would be helpful if there were some guidelines for teacher dress code as I believe that these have decreased dramatically during my teaching career. As principal, I find this one of the most difficult issues to deal with – teachers sometimes see this as subjective on my part.⁸¹

The Committee notes that the issue of professional clothing can be very personal and sensitive, and believes that clear guidelines or policies determined at a school level may help reduce the likelihood that differences in opinion will occur between employees and school administrators.

It is not within the scope of this inquiry to address staff dress codes as a separate issue. However, it is worthwhile to note that many of the issues discussed in the following chapters may apply to dress codes for staff, as well as for students. This may be especially true for health and safety policies, such as sun protection; and anti-discrimination issues, such as gender equity and clothing with religious significance. As a number of contributors to the inquiry noted, staff attire may have an 'unspoken' but significant influence on students' attitudes and appearance. The Committee therefore believes that schools should encourage staff to demonstrate the values reflected in their student dress codes and uniform policies.

Recommendation 2.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines encourage schools to consider standards for staff dress and appearance during the development and review of dress codes and school uniform policies.

Other Aspects of Student Appearance

Neither dress codes nor school uniform policies are necessarily confined to what students can or must wear. Most schools make rules about other aspects of student appearance, including hair length, style and colour; facial hair; jewellery;

⁷⁸ Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.11; Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.14.

⁷⁹ Ms M. Pumpa, Year 10 Student, Collingwood College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.11.

⁸⁰ Mont Albert School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁸¹ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

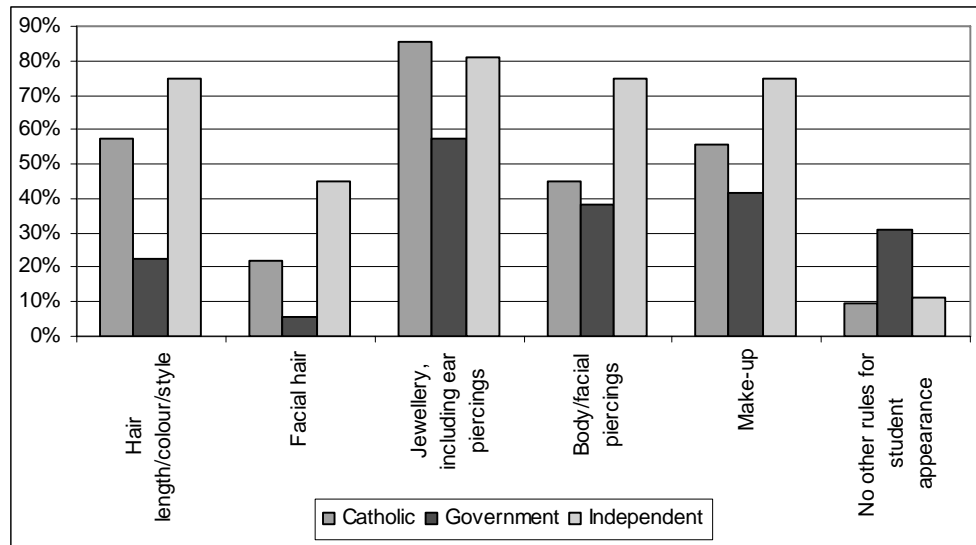
'[If] any forms of individualism, such as piercings or unnatural hair colours, are abolished... [and] there must be no tattoos and no make-up... It almost sounds like the requirements of a military uniform. But high school is not a military operation; high school is an important time of self-reflection and discovery, being creative and opening our minds.'

Lizzie Forrest, Year 11 Student, University High School

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body and facial piercing; and make-up. Figure 2.5 shows the percentage of schools in each sector (Catholic, government and independent) that make regulations relating to specific aspects of students' personal appearance.

Figure 2.5: Incidence of rules relating to aspects of student appearance other than clothing in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

For almost all aspects of student appearance investigated, schools in the independent sector are the most likely to make regulations. The government sector has the highest proportion of schools that do not make any rules about student appearance. Jewellery is the aspect of student appearance most likely to be regulated in all sectors.⁸²

The Committee heard a range of views from students about school rules relating to student appearance. Some students, particularly in older year levels, believe that such rules are an infringement on students' rights:

... it is the student's personal right to do everything in that area.⁸³

Students have a right to wear make-up and grow facial hair to ensure that their education does not suffer from a reduced sense of comfort at school.⁸⁴

For other students, such rules have a worthwhile purpose in preventing distractions or unwanted attention:

At our school we also think that boys and girls should not be allowed to wear make-up, apart from lip balm, so that they do not spend half their day worrying about how they look.⁸⁵

Other uniform policy rules need to cover jewellery, hair colour, make-up and piercings to avoid unnecessary individual student attention.⁸⁶

However, for Ms Anna Richardson, Year 6 Student, Spensley Street Primary School, such rules are irrelevant to the core purpose of schooling:

⁸² Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁸³ Mr J. Trew, Year 11 Student, Apollo Bay P-12 College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.7.

⁸⁴ Mr A. Greig, Year 12 Student, Frankston High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.9.

⁸⁵ Mr B. Fernando, Year 6 Student, Laburnum Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.6.

⁸⁶ Mr N. Facey, Year 6 Student, Benalla Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.6.

... we feel as long as you are a committed and motivated learner it should not matter how many studs you have, what colour your hair is, or if you have stubble. How you look does not change how you behave in class or what your learning abilities are, which is what we think school is about.⁸⁷

Other contributors to the inquiry demonstrated a similarly diverse range of views.

The aspect of student appearance that attracted the most comment in this inquiry was body jewellery and piercings. As views on piercings are evolving rapidly in Australian communities, students' and parents' values are often at odds with school policies and practices. Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, reported that piercings often constitute the most contentious issue in school dress codes:

Piercings policy...is the one that draws the most abuse from parents who regard putting holes in their children's bodies as a really nice birthday present!⁸⁸

Contention about facial piercings is not just confined to schools. Two recent court cases involving enforcement of the staff dress code in a supermarket chain have related to visible body piercings, which staff members have been asked to remove.⁸⁹ Piercings also appeared on the Victorian policy agenda in 2007, with legislation proposed to introduce stricter requirements for parental consent for piercings for young people under the age of 18.⁹⁰

The Committee found that schools tend to make rules relating to body and facial piercings for two main reasons. First, schools regulate piercings in order to reflect the image that the school wants its students to uphold. Although facial and body piercings have become increasingly commonplace in society, especially among teenagers, they still carry connotations of rebellion and poor presentation for many people. This is often incompatible with the values that schools typically wish to portray through their uniform policies. Secondly, schools regulate body and facial piercings because they may present a risk to student health and safety. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 3.

Conclusion

Current policies and practices relating to dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools are extremely diverse. The Committee found widespread agreement among contributors to this inquiry that choices about uniforms should continue to be made by individual schools and their communities. For this reason, the Committee does not believe it is appropriate to introduce a general requirement for Victorian schools to have a school uniform. To reflect the positive attitude to diversity that characterises the Victorian school system, dress codes and school uniform policies should continue to reflect the individual values, preferences and standards of each unique school community.

⁸⁷ Ms A. Richardson, Year 6 Student, Spensley Street Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.7.

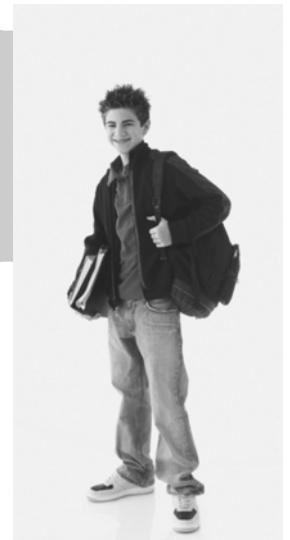
⁸⁸ Principal, quoted by Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.4.

⁸⁹ *Woolworths Limited (trading as Safeway) v Brown* (26 September 2005, PR963023) and *Woolworths Limited (trading as Safeway) v Miller* (23 December 2005, PR943241), cited in Lander & Rogers, *Workplace Relations & Safety Bulletin*, March 2006.

⁹⁰ *Summary Offences Amendment (Body Piercing) Bill 2007*, introduced in the Legislative Council on 18 July 2007 by Mr D. Drum (Northern Victoria).

Chapter 3:

Health and Safety



Introduction

Schools have a duty of care to ensure that their students are protected against foreseeable harm.⁹¹

Principals and teachers have a legal, professional and moral duty to take reasonable steps to protect students in their charge from foreseeable harm. As awareness of legal rights and responsibilities has increased within the community, schools have become more adept at identifying potential risks to student health, safety and wellbeing. However, some members of the education community are concerned that schools do not always fully understand what is involved in translating this duty of care into practice.⁹² Within this context, the Committee considered how student health, safety and wellbeing can and should be reflected in dress codes and school uniform policies. In reviewing this issue, the Committee investigated both the direct and indirect impact of dress codes and school uniforms on a range of physical and psychological aspects of student health and wellbeing.

Safe Clothing for School Activities

The Committee found that both schools with and without uniforms have rules relating to general health and safety standards for school clothing. Some schools also reported additional safety clothing for special classes, such as overalls for automotive or engineering subjects. Health and safety standards are also likely to be higher for physical education classes or sport, where increased activity creates special risks.

Many schools also have general health and safety standards for student footwear. The details of such regulations vary from school to school. A requirement for closed-toed shoes in technology classes was commonly reported, and many schools require that closed shoes be worn at all times. The Committee heard that in one case, shoes are required to be leather for safety reasons, although this draws some objections from parents.⁹³

The rules that many schools make for other aspects of student appearance besides clothing are also sometimes triggered by health and safety concerns. A common example is the requirement that long hair be tied back for school activities, especially during sport or technology classes. Safety is also a contributing factor in many schools' rules relating to student jewellery, as a dangling necklace or earring may easily cause injury to the wearer or another student during certain school activities or active play.

Sun Protection

One of the most direct ways in which dress codes and school uniforms can protect student health and safety is through protection from the sun. The Committee heard that over 380,000 Australians are diagnosed with skin cancer each year, despite it

⁹¹ Ms K. Strong, SunSmart Program Manager, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.17.

⁹² Mr A. Blair, President, Australian Secondary Principals Association, cited in H. Borger 2006, 'OHS in schools', *National Safety*, Vol. 77 No. 10, November 2006, p.36.

⁹³ Mr Jim Alsop, School Principal, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

being an almost entirely preventable cancer. It is estimated that more than 75 per cent of all skin cancers could be prevented by practising sun protection in childhood and adolescence.⁹⁴ As sun damage to students' skin represents a foreseeable risk, the Cancer Council Victoria believes it falls within schools' duty of care to prevent it.⁹⁵

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development currently supports sun protective practices within its *Safety Guidelines for Education Outdoors*. Guidelines relating to sun protective clothing are as follows:

- Hats with a broad (at least 8 centimetres) brim made of a closely woven material and legionnaire-style hats may be appropriate, particularly for younger children.
- Sun-protective clothing. Loose, closely woven cotton fabrics and shirts with a collar and long sleeves are ideal.
- Consider the use of sunglasses.⁹⁶

The Department's guidelines also include information about the use of sunscreen.

The most prominent sun protection initiative in Victorian schools is the Cancer Council Victoria's SunSmart Program. SunSmart is a not-for-profit program funded through the Australian and Victorian governments and the Cancer Council Victoria. It provides a range of resources to assist schools to develop appropriate sun protection policies. Schools can join the program by having their sun protection policy assessed against the Cancer Council Victoria's criteria. A SunSmart policy should include a rationale for the policy; sun protection measures; and an evaluation plan for checking the effectiveness of the policy.⁹⁷

The Cancer Council Victoria reports that 67 per cent of Victorian schools are currently registered as SunSmart. Table 3.1 shows the number and proportion of SunSmart schools in Victoria, across sectors and levels of schooling.

Table 3.1: SunSmart schools in Victoria, by sector and level

Sector	Primary		Secondary		Primary and Secondary		Special		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Catholic	292	77%	31	29%	2	13%	1	20%	326	64%
Government	1093	88%	64	20%	29	60%	52	63%	1238	73%
Independent	30	50%	3	6%	49	39%	1	17%	93	35%
TOTAL	1415	84%	98	20%	80	42%	54	58%	1657	67%

Source: Data supplied by the Cancer Council Victoria, May 2007.

While all education sectors in Victoria participate in the SunSmart Program, participation rates in the independent sector are significantly lower than for the government and Catholic sectors. Significant differences are also evident between levels of schooling, with primary schools far more likely to participate in the SunSmart Program. The Committee recognises that there are many reasons that schools may choose not to participate in the SunSmart Program and it should not be assumed that such schools do not have effective sun protection policies in place. Nonetheless, the Committee notes that SunSmart has recently revised its

⁹⁴ Ms K. Strong, SunSmart Program Manager, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.16.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.7.

⁹⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, *Safety Guidelines for Education Outdoors*, DEECD, Melbourne, available on DEECD website, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/edoutdoors/guidelinessun.htm>>, accessed on 18 September 2007.

⁹⁷ Further information is available at the SunSmart website, <<http://www.sunsmart.com.au/>>.

sun protection program for secondary schools, to try and achieve higher take-up rates at this level of schooling.⁹⁸

The Committee believes that sun protection is an important issue that should be carefully considered by all schools. The Committee recognises that the needs, activities and environments of schools throughout Victoria vary considerably and therefore does not see mandated standards for sun protective clothing in Victorian schools as necessary at this point in time. Indeed, the Committee was especially pleased at the considerable efforts already made by many schools in devising sun protection policies suitable to their needs and capacity. The Committee believes that all schools should at least consider the potential benefits of sun protective clothing for their students, and include a statement about sun protection within their dress codes and school uniform policies. Specific sun protective items that schools may wish to consider are examined in greater detail in the following sections.

Recommendation 3.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to include a statement addressing sun protection in their dress codes or school uniform policies.

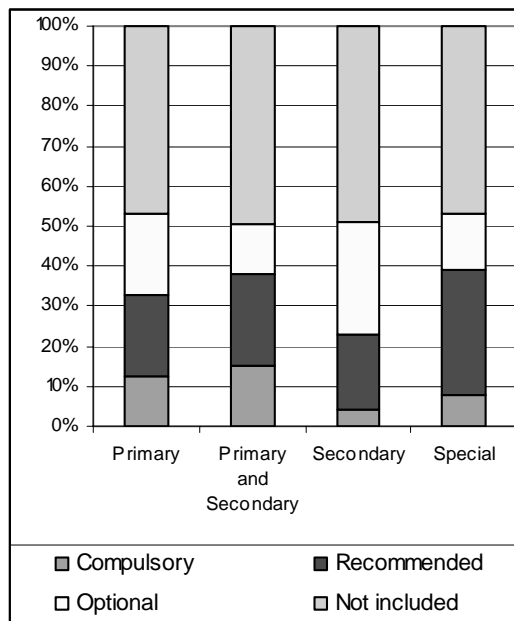
Recommendation 3.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development promote best practice case studies for incorporating sun protective clothing and sunglasses into dress codes and school uniform policies in the guidelines they provide to schools.

Sun Protective Clothing

The Cancer Council Victoria recommends that students wear clothing (including sports uniforms) that covers as much of the students' skin as practical. The Council's sample SunSmart policies recommend that clothing is made of close weave fabric and include: shirts with collars and elbow length or longer sleeves; and longer style dresses and shorts that are at least knee-length. Recommendations for sports uniforms differ, to take account of the need for freedom of movement. They include: a shirt that covers the shoulders; a collar that sits close to the neck; shorts or skirts to the mid-thigh (although longer garments are recommended); a baseball cap where a broad brimmed or bucket hat is impractical; and rash vests or t-shirts for outdoor swimming.⁹⁹

The Committee's survey investigated whether sun protective garments are compulsory, recommended, optional or not included in Victorian school uniform policies. Results for different levels of schooling are shown in Figures 3.1 and 3.2.

Figure 3.1: Policies on elbow-length garments in Victorian schools, by level (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁹⁸ Further information is available at the SunSmart website, <<http://www.sunsmart.com.au/browse.asp?ContainerID=1844>>.

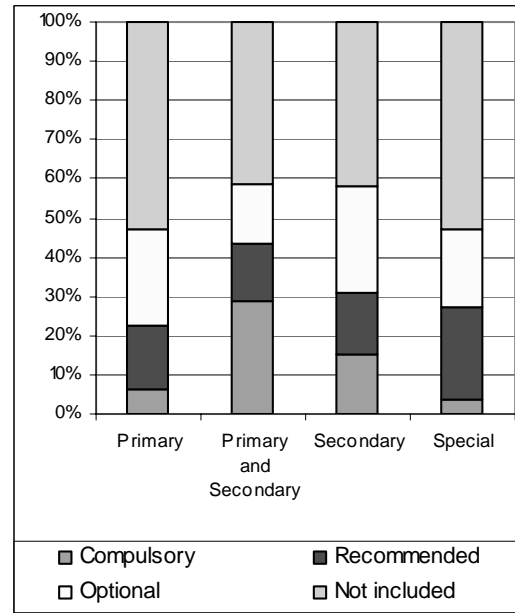
⁹⁹ SunSmart website, <<http://www.sunsmart.com.au/browse.asp?ContainerID=1843>>, accessed on 22 November 2007.

'If it is left up to students to determine whether they wear SunSmart clothing, their ignorance and rebellious spirit may prevent them from wearing such items. Should the ignorance of youth be rewarded with the consequences that might come in later life?'

Stephen Smith, Year 11 Student, Yea High School

The Committee notes that almost half of Victorian schools do not include elbow and knee length garments in their dress codes or school uniforms, even on an optional basis. Elbow-length sleeves are required or recommended in only 31.4 per cent of Victorian schools.¹⁰⁰ However, there is evidence to suggest that many others (including schools without uniforms) have considered sun safety by allowing these garments as optional items, or by requiring students to wear summer tops that at least cover their shoulders.¹⁰¹ Knee-length garments are slightly less common as required or recommended items (30.0%), although a further 22.9 per cent of schools allow such garments as an optional item within the dress code or school uniform.¹⁰² These findings demonstrate that many school uniforms fall short of the Cancer Council Victoria's optimal recommendations, despite the high uptake of SunSmart policies in Victorian schools.

Figure 3.2: Policies on knee-length garments in Victorian schools, by level (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Sun Hats

The Cancer Council Victoria recommends that dress codes and school uniform policies include the following minimum standards regarding sun protective hats:

- Broad brimmed hats with a brim of at least 7.5 cm.
- Bucket or 'surfie-style hats' with a deep crown and brim of at least 6 cm.
- Legionnaire hats, which have a flap that covers the neck. The side flap and front peak should meet to provide protection to the side of the face.¹⁰³

The Council recommends the same style hats for PE and sports, where practical. However, the Council notes that schools may need to consider baseball caps as part of their sports uniform where a sun protective hat may restrict vision or be unsafe for particular sports.¹⁰⁴

The Committee's survey found that nearly three-quarters of Victorian schools require their students to wear hats outside during summer (see Figure 3.3). Additional comments revealed that some schools only require hats to be worn during PE classes, or when students are not in the shade.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

¹⁰¹ For example, Croydon Community School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007; St Kilda Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

¹⁰² Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

¹⁰³ SunSmart website, <<http://www.sunsmart.com.au/browse.asp?ContainerID=1843>>, accessed on 13 November 2007.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September, 2007.

The Committee found primary schools (98.2%), primary/secondary schools (82.4%) and special schools (78.4%) are much more likely than secondary schools (34.7%) to include a compulsory sun hat in their uniform policy. Of particular interest is the finding that 4.8 per cent of secondary schools do not include a sun protective hat in their dress codes or school uniform policies, even on an optional basis.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, it is reasonably common within secondary schools for hats to be compulsory for junior students, but only recommended for seniors.¹⁰⁷

The Committee received written submissions indicating that some parents and carers are concerned that their secondary school children are not required to wear sun hats at school.¹⁰⁸ One such parent told the Committee that the explanation offered by the school was that it is difficult to make secondary students comply with a compulsory hat policy:

Students, after leaving primary school where the wearing of sunhats is compulsory, [find hats are not] a compulsory part of their uniform when they go into Secondary College. After questioning staff on this rather strange decision, we were told that it was hard to make sunhats compulsory for students at this age.¹⁰⁹

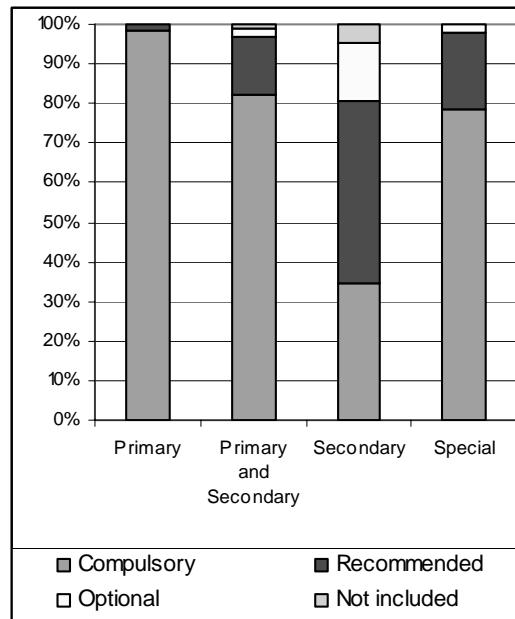
Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, told the Committee that this view on enforcement is shared by many secondary principals in Victoria. Principals report that they find SunSmart policies 'unbelievably hard to enforce' due to secondary students' dislike for wearing anything other than fashionable, non-protective hats.¹¹⁰

During the public hearing involving 125 Victorian students, the Committee heard that many students reject sun-safe hats because they are considered 'daggy' or 'dorky'. When the Committee asked primary students whether they intended to wear a sun hat at secondary school, two students' responses indicated that bullying and peer pressure may be an inhibiting factor:

If you are the only one wearing it, I would not be happy because you might get teased or bullied.¹¹¹

At most high schools — the high school I am going to — wearing a hat is optional. I think most students do not wear them, and I am not really sure if I will.¹¹²

Figure 3.3: Policies on sun protective hats in Victorian schools, by level (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September, 2007; Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

¹⁰⁸ Parents Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.4; Ms C. Wyatt, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

¹⁰⁹ Ms E. Dickin, Grandparent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

¹¹⁰ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.3.

¹¹¹ Mr N. Carlei, Year 6 Student, Essendon Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.14.

¹¹² Mr G. Steger, Year 6 Student, St Kilda Park Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.14.

'...at our school, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, half the students are adults — they are 18. They can drink, they can drive and they can smoke — all of which involve health risks — so it seems ridiculous that the school might say it is not their choice whether they wear a hat.'

Jaan Butler, Year 12 Student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Both of these students attended SunSmart primary schools at the time of the hearing. It therefore appears to the Committee that the desire to 'fit in' to the secondary school community can sometimes undermine sun protection practices taught by primary schools.

Ms Jennifer Makin, Research and Evaluation Manager, SunSmart Program, noted that some Victorian students prefer strict enforcement of sun hat policies, to overcome pressure from their peers:

Interestingly, quite a lot of the students have said, 'It would be better if we had stricter rules. If you force us to do it then we will do it; but we cannot choose of our own accord because it is too daggy to wear a hat, but if the department said that everyone had to do it then we would all do it'.¹¹³

Mrs Evelyn Sayers, Board Member, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, made a similar point, in describing the SunSmart policy at her school:

At my school we are a SunSmart school, so we do have the dorky hats, as the students call them. But because everybody is wearing the dorky hat, it does not become an issue. We have talked about things: 'Well, you're not here to be a fashion statement. We really care about your health and what's going to happen to you later on in life'. So once you get over that part, they understand it is not a choice of just taking it off and not wearing it.¹¹⁴

One parent noted in a written submission that the supposed difficulties of enforcing compulsory hat policies at secondary schools appear inconsistent with successful enforcement of other aspects of their uniform policies:

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...¹¹⁵

Another written submission from a parent, Ms Bev Johns, supported this view:

...while they say students are encouraged to wear a hat, no child does as they will be bullied by other children...It seems we can make a policy to enforce the wearing of blazers to look good, but not a policy of hats that may be life saving...¹¹⁶

It appears to the Committee then, that many parents and even some students may welcome the introduction of stricter sun hat policies in secondary schools.

However, the following comment indicates that stricter measures would not be well regarded by all secondary principals:

Anyone who has had to nag an adolescent about...a broad brimmed hat will know that detailed compliance will be an untenable and unworkable burden for secondaries.¹¹⁷

Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, stated that principals would prefer to see recommendations but no mandatory requirements in terms of SunSmart policies.¹¹⁸

The Committee heard that many secondary schools are adopting more negotiated approaches to sun hat policies, rather than taking on the battle of strict compliance. Ms Emma Clarkson, SunSmart's Secondary Schools Program Coordinator, reported that some secondary schools have improved compliance by asking students to design and vote on a hat for their school.¹¹⁹ Mr Stephen Franz-Ford, Chief Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, reported

¹¹³ Ms J. Makin, SunSmart Program Research and Evaluation Manager, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.20.

¹¹⁴ Mrs E. Sayers, Board Member, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.36.

¹¹⁵ Ms V. McGowan, Parent, Written Submission, August 2007, p.1.

¹¹⁶ Ms B. Johns, Parent, Supplementary Submission, June 2007, p.1.

¹¹⁷ Principal, quoted in Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.4.

¹¹⁸ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.4.

¹¹⁹ Ms E. Clarkson, SunSmart Secondary Schools Program Coordinator, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.18.

another innovative measure taken by one secondary school, to gain student support for its SunSmart policy:

The problem is that most secondary school kids want the up-market [hat] with the surfing logo...that is worth four times as much as the one without a surfing logo...My school went to the supplier from China that made them for one of the large surfing groups. We were able to incorporate a logo that looked similar to the surfing one, with the school's name on it; so it became fashionable to wear the hat.¹²⁰

The Committee notes that other schools simply permit students to wear whatever hat they choose, within appropriate sun protection guidelines.¹²¹

It is important to recognise that the discrepancy between sun hat policies for primary and secondary schools may reflect fundamental differences in students' environments and activities. Some secondary students told the Committee that their schools are mainly indoors, so sun protection is seldom an issue.¹²² Some members of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals also remarked that secondary students' school activities do not typically put them in danger of sun exposure:

Many of the older students basically sit around and talk. That is what their lunchtime activity is, and they will sit in the shade.¹²³

Students spend the majority of their day inside when they are at school on a normal day. I have yet to hear from a parent complaining about a student who has been sunburnt whilst at school during a standard school day.¹²⁴

We already consider the timing of activities, we include sunscreen in kits.¹²⁵

The Committee encourages all members of the community to wear sun protective clothing, including a suitable hat, whenever they are exposed to the sun. However, given the above evidence, the Committee does not see it as necessary to make sun protective hats compulsory in all Victorian schools. Rather, the Committee believes that all schools should encourage their students to wear a hat outside during summer months and, as a minimum standard, include a sun protective hat as an option within their dress codes and school uniform policies.

Recommendation 3.3: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to make a sun protective hat available to students as part of their dress codes or school uniform policies.

Sunglasses

The Committee heard that although a broad-brimmed hat reduces UV exposure to the eye by 50 per cent, the addition of sunglasses can reduce UV radiation to the eye by 97 per cent.¹²⁶ Like hats and clothing, sunglasses must meet certain minimum standards to be effective protection against the sun:

Students and staff are encouraged to wear close fitting, wrap around sunglasses that meet the Australian Standard 1067 (Sunglasses: Category 2, 3 or 4) and cover as much of the eye area as possible.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Mr S. Franzi-Ford, Chief Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.13.

¹²¹ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

¹²² Ms S. Pittard, Year 12 Student, Ballarat Secondary College and Mr P. Clearwater, Year 12 Student, Melbourne High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, pp.17-18.

¹²³ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.3.

¹²⁴ Principal, quoted in Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.4.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Ms K. Strong, SunSmart Program Manager, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.20.

¹²⁷ Supplementary information provided by The Cancer Council Victoria, May 2007.

A number of optometrists have recently come forward to recommend that schools require students to wear sunglasses outside during summer as part of their sun protection policies.¹²⁸ The *Herald Sun* reports that Findon Primary School in Mill Park has become the first in Victoria to make sunglasses compulsory for students and that others are expected to follow.¹²⁹ One preschool in Lalor East has also recently introduced a compulsory sunglasses policy for children in its care.¹³⁰

However, the Committee heard from Ms Emma Clarkson, Coordinator, SunSmart Secondary Schools program, that any attempt to make sunglasses mandatory for Victorian students would cause some concerns, due to the associated costs and practical difficulties.¹³¹ Sunglasses are therefore a recommended but optional component of the SunSmart Program's guidelines.¹³² Ms Kate Kohn, Year 6 Student, Laburnum Primary School, explained some of the reasons why sunglasses might present particular difficulties for primary schools:

We think UV-protective sunglasses for students in primary schools would be difficult to achieve due to their cost. They are expensive, and there is the potential for young children to lose or damage the sunglasses. We therefore see sunglasses as an optional item in school uniforms.¹³³

Secondary students also noted potential difficulties with sunglasses, including their fashion status for many young people, cost and the possibility of students wearing them at inappropriate times.¹³⁴ One student also noted that sunglasses are unnecessary within her school environment, as the majority of the campus is indoors.¹³⁵

Although sunglasses are not currently compulsory in most Victorian schools, some schools encourage students to wear sunglasses outside, and only 5.4 per cent of schools reported to the Committee that they do not allow students to wear sunglasses.¹³⁶ The Committee heard that one primary school adopted an innovative approach to overcoming the difficulties associated with sunglasses for primary students by engraving them with students' names.¹³⁷ The Committee also heard the example of a secondary school which strongly encourages sunglasses to be worn at appropriate times during the school day, using staff role modelling to set an example for its students.¹³⁸ The Committee encourages schools to investigate the possibilities for making sunglasses available to students during the summer months, as an element of best practice in sun protection.

Clothing for Other Weather Conditions

The Committee heard that a school uniform policy which prevents children from dressing appropriately for the weather can potentially constitute a health risk. A number of concerns about school uniforms being inappropriate to local weather

¹²⁸ D. Selva, quoted in 'Should sunglasses be part of school uniforms', *Northern District Times*, 1 August 2007.

¹²⁹ P. Rolfe, 'Sunglasses rule', *Sunday Herald Sun*, 2 September 2007, p.18.

¹³⁰ P. Rolfe & C. Lambert, 'Kinder eyes sunnies', *Sunday Herald Sun*, 21 October 2007, p.34.

¹³¹ Ms E. Clarkson, Sun Smart Secondary Schools Program Coordinator, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.20.

¹³² Ms K. Strong, SunSmart Program Manager, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.20.

¹³³ Ms K. Cohn, Year 6 Student, Laburnum Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.13.

¹³⁴ Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, pp.19-21.

¹³⁵ Ms S. Pittard, Year 12 Student, Ballarat Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.17.

¹³⁶ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September, 2007.

¹³⁷ Ms E. Clarkson, SunSmart Secondary Schools Program Coordinator, The Cancer Council Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.20.

¹³⁸ Mr N. Dubbeld, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly, 6 September 2007.

conditions were voiced to the Committee by students and parents throughout this inquiry. For example:

...we get cold on cold days and we wear overcoats, and [our teachers] are cracking down on us, saying we are not allowed to, but we are not allowed to stay inside, and it gets really cold...¹³⁹

...both of my children have had colds and flu recently but have been told to remove their jackets because they do not conform with the school uniform policy. My son has had his confiscated during recess on several occasions when it has been below 11 degrees outside.¹⁴⁰

The high levels of frustration felt by parents at being prevented from taking basic steps to protect their children's health is exemplified in the following extract from Ms Carolyn Mann's written submission:

...our government school has introduced a compulsory blazer to be worn to and from school – regardless of the weather conditions. This is totally unsuitable when students are required to wear a blazer on a hot day, on a hot bus. It has potential to be a health risk. In addition, this same blazer is useless on a day where students are standing in the rain at a bus stop, in the freezing cold weather with only a wet blazer on. They need waterproof/warm coats and not a blazer which the school decides 'looks good'!¹⁴¹

These comments show how a school uniform that is not appropriate for variable weather conditions can cause resentment among members of a school community. This can also have an adverse effect on compliance with the uniform policy, as students wear non-compliant clothing more suitable to the conditions, often sanctioned by their parents.

The Committee observed that most school uniform policies are flexible, allowing students to readily adapt to prevailing conditions.¹⁴² In summer, most schools allow students to wear dresses or shorts and short-sleeved tops. Most schools with a compulsory blazer do not enforce its wearing in summer, provided that students do not wear an alternative outer garment such as a jumper or windcheater in its place. For winter, most schools incorporate a range of optional items, which students can add for warmth. These include for example, skivvies, beanies, scarves, gloves and a range of jackets and raincoats. Some schools make detailed specifications about such items, while others only require that if worn, they be worn in school colours or even more simply, in 'plain colours' or 'without logos'. Many schools also demonstrate their flexibility on this issue, by allowing students to wear either the summer or winter uniform throughout the year, rather than enforcing strict dates for summer and winter uniforms.¹⁴³

With so many alternatives available, the Committee was surprised to find that some schools seemingly require students to wear uniforms that do not allow for adequate adaptation to the extremes of Victoria's changeable weather. The Committee does not feel that any Victorian student should be prevented from dressing comfortably for the weather, through strict enforcement of an inappropriate or inadequate school uniform. It therefore recommends that information addressing this issue be included in departmental guidelines.

Recommendation 3.4: That guidelines developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development include advice to assist schools to develop dress codes and school uniform policies that ensure students can be comfortable in all weather conditions.

¹³⁹ Mr J. Wright, Year 8 Student, Western Heights Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.17.

¹⁴⁰ Ms K. Filgate, Parent, Written Submission, August 2007, p.1.

¹⁴¹ Ms C. Mann, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007, p.2.

¹⁴² Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Over the past ten years, schools and education systems have given increasing attention to students' mental health.¹⁴⁴ The Australian Government funds a national mental health initiative for secondary schools, *MindMatters*, and the *National Mental Health Plan 2006–2011* also recognises the need for school-based mental health promotion.¹⁴⁵ In tandem with these initiatives, there are also growing community expectations that a school's duty of care towards student health encompasses issues of self-esteem, resilience and emotional wellbeing.

One of the most frequently cited benefits of having a school uniform throughout this inquiry was the sense of belonging it engenders in the school community. In its review of related literature, the Committee found evidence that a sense of belonging is one of the mainstays of student emotional health:

Recently, attention has been given to the importance of a young person's sense of attachment or belonging in their social environments...For example, Resnick and associates (1997) found that a sense of belonging to both family and school are the major protective factors against health risk behaviours in young people.¹⁴⁶

Written submissions from the Salvation Army, the Smith Family and several schools emphasised that the sense of belonging and inclusion gained by wearing a school uniform is particularly beneficial for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.¹⁴⁷ Mr Les Twentyman, Outreach Worker, Open Family Australia, made similar remarks during a public hearing:

I guess overall school uniforms are very important in giving young kids a sense of belonging and things like that. Quite often that is basically where they have not had the opportunity of being part of a group before.¹⁴⁸

A range of organisations representing students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds also described how school uniforms can contribute to a sense of belonging to the school community. The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria and the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues noted that mandatory school uniforms (whilst allowing for cultural and religious clothing preferences) may assist students from new and emerging communities settle into a new school environment.¹⁴⁹ Dr Mark Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc noted similar experiences among indigenous students:

I believe access to be like every other kid is important. There are enough signposts around Aboriginal kids to make them different. A uniform that gives them camouflage to be like every other kid is really important to us...¹⁵⁰

Schools with uniforms also frequently reported that wearing a school uniform gives students a sense of pride, both in their school and in their personal appearance. Ms Jo Silver, Executive Officer, Victorian Parents Council, told the Committee that many parents support this view:

...wearing a uniform is an opportunity to be proud, it encourages self-esteem, and it eliminates any sense of competition in dress standards which might otherwise exist.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ H. Borger 2007, 'Wellness in Schools', *National Safety*, Vol. 77, No. 11, December 2006 – January 2007, p.16.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.17.

¹⁴⁶ S. Glover, J. Burns, H. Butler & G. Patton 1998, 'Social Environments and the Emotional Wellbeing of Young People', *Family Matters*, No.49, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne, pp.11-12.

¹⁴⁷ The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division, Written Submission, April 2007, p.1; Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.3; Merrilands College School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

¹⁴⁸ Mr L. Twentyman, Outreach Worker, Open Family Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.30.

¹⁴⁹ Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2; Ms L. McGaw, Coordinator of Youth Participation Programs, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.31.

¹⁵⁰ Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.29.

¹⁵¹ Ms J. Silver, Executive Officer, Victorian Parents Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, pp.10-11.

Secondary students participating in the public hearing at Parliament House told the Committee that having pride also helps inspire students to achieve:

I think that the uniform is a valuable asset. I think it builds pride in the school and it creates a sense of unity that allows us to aspire to achieve more than we would in those schools that do not have a uniform.¹⁵²

...if a student believes they are part of a close-knit network — in this case, a school — we believe they will be more inclined to take part in the activities that the school has to offer. For example, a footballer like Nick Riewoldt, wearing the St Kilda uniform, will really feel part of that team, and therefore his uniform will create a sense of intrinsic motivation and the will to succeed or achieve.¹⁵³

The Committee heard that having a sense of pride may also contribute to higher levels of self-esteem, which is another key element of emotional health. Self-esteem has been identified as the strongest single factor in preventing depression, a major mental health concern for Australian adolescents.¹⁵⁴

As well as promoting positive mental health attributes, it was also suggested that school uniforms can reduce negative influences on mental health in the school environment. For example, many submissions to the inquiry, from across all stakeholder groups, mentioned that uniforms remove peer pressure to follow the latest fashion trends.¹⁵⁵ Year 10 students at Braybrook College explained in their written submission how students who fail to conform to their peers' standards of dress can be subject not only to peer pressure, but also teasing and bullying:

...if school uniforms were compulsory in every school, certain students who cannot afford the latest item of clothing will not have to worry about bullying because of their financial problems. They will also not have to worry about peer pressure. Students will also not have to worry about rumours and gossip about how they are wearing the same item of clothing that they were wearing the previous day.¹⁵⁶

Bullying and peer pressure are known to be potential contributing factors to mental health difficulties experienced by children and adolescents.

On the other hand, schools without uniforms told the Committee that not having a uniform has important benefits for students' emotional health. Mr Vincent Sicari, Principal, Eltham High School, explained how students build confidence and self-esteem by being challenged to make choices about their personal presentation:

Young people, especially in their teens, are striving to come to terms with their place in the world. Enabling them to develop a responsibility for their own clothing and allowing them a relatively harmless outlet to express their own individuality, can only be positive for their growth and self-esteem.¹⁵⁷

Princes Hill Secondary College's written submission also outlined the benefits of a uniform-free policy for adolescent health and development:

Adolescent health and holistic approach to student identity...emerged as a theme in parent responses. One voice asserted that students were able to break from the clutches of marketing and advertising by experimenting with different dress styles as adolescents, and that has a positive effect in terms of students exploring body image on their own terms.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Mr P. Clearwater, Year 12 Student, Melbourne High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.36.

¹⁵³ Ms J. Shemer, Year 10 Student, Balwyn High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.7.

¹⁵⁴ A.R. MacPhee & J.J.W. Andrews 2006, 'Risk factors for depression in early adolescence', *Adolescence*, 41.163, p.435.

¹⁵⁵ For example, The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division, Written Submission, April 2007, p.1; Ashwood College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Victorian Student Representative Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2; Mr L. Deegan, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.13.

¹⁵⁶ Students of 10C English, Braybrook College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

¹⁵⁸ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

'It is a truism that children do not stop excluding others when everyone is in the same uniform. This highlights the need for school values based on sound, healthy interpersonal relationships.'

Kate Renzenbrink,
Parent

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Similarly, Spensley Street Primary School lists one of its goals in not having a school uniform as 'to enable students to develop a positive self image'.¹⁵⁹

Furthermore, students, parents and staff from uniform-free schools emphatically dismissed concerns that students in such schools are at any increased risk of peer pressure or bullying. The following comments represent a small sample of such reassurances received by the Committee:

I feel there is a misguided sense of what it is really like to go to a uniform-free school. It is not full of bullying, or people are not specifically judged on what they wear.¹⁶⁰

The school deals with few bullying issues, and peer pressure to conform to dress standards is rare.¹⁶¹

...fashion competition quickly disappears, and within a couple of weeks of starting Year 7, is forgotten.¹⁶²

At Collingwood College you do not have to wear a uniform or wear the same thing as everyone else to feel proud of being a part of the community. For those people who think that you have to wear the newest labels or the most fashionable clothes to be cool, it is not true.¹⁶³

Further, some students from schools without uniforms observed that peer pressure relating to clothing may be just as bad, if not worse, at schools with a uniform:

I know that if we did have a uniform, there would still be forms of peer group pressure because you could still tell who was financially not as well off as other people. There is stuff like iPods and phones and other things that people have that you can tell that some kids do not have them and stuff like that. It is just dealt with as any other form of bullying. It should not be separated from bullying as a full issue. If the school has a good bullying policy, then there should not be any at all, in my view.¹⁶⁴

The pressure to wear expensive clothes is much more apparent in uniformed schools on free dress days, when students feel a heightened obligation to impress their peers with grand clothes.¹⁶⁵

The Committee therefore notes that perceptions of bullying and competitive dressing in schools without uniforms may not be borne out in reality.

The Committee believes that all schools, with or without uniforms, should have strategies in place to address student mental wellbeing. Strategies should address a range of areas, including self-esteem, peer pressure and bullying. Schools may also wish to consider how their dress code or uniform policy can influence students' mental wellbeing, as part of their broader mental health promotion strategy.

Physical Activity

Physical activity is another prominent issue for student health. The Victorian Government's Better Health Channel reports that around 20 per cent of Australian children are either overweight or obese. If current trends continue, it is predicted that 65 per cent of young Australians will be overweight or obese by 2020.¹⁶⁶ The weight gain is most often attributed to increased intake of high-energy foods, accompanied by a decline in physical activity. Throughout this inquiry, the

¹⁵⁹ Spensley Street Primary School, Parent Association, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

¹⁶⁰ Ms O. Koh, Year 11 Student, University High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.24.

¹⁶¹ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.5.

¹⁶² Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

¹⁶³ Ms M. Pumpa, Year 10 Student, Collingwood College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.18.

¹⁶⁴ Ms G. Kennelly, Student Representative, Victorian Student Representative Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.19.

¹⁶⁵ Mr N. Hudson, Year 12 Student, Eltham High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.27.

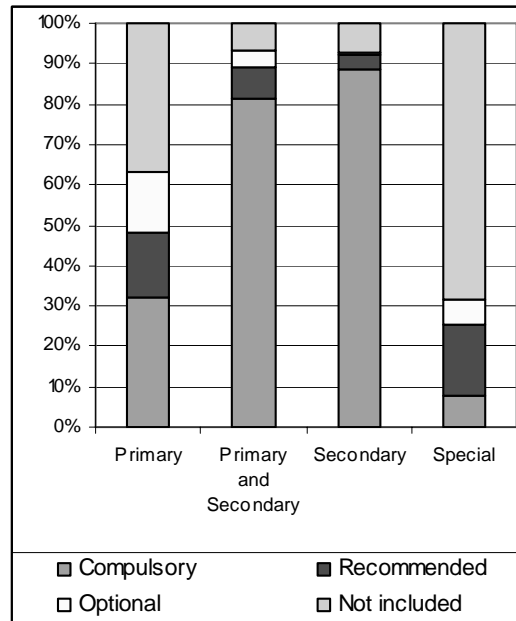
¹⁶⁶ Victorian Government Better Health Channel website, <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Obesity_in_children?open>, viewed on 26 November 2007.

Committee heard that dress codes and school uniform policies have the potential to either encourage or inhibit physical activity among students.

Students' physical activity typically includes structured school activities such as physical education (PE) classes and sports, as well as active play and active transport (walking or cycling to or from school).

The Committee found that the majority of Victorian schools require or allow students to change their clothes for PE classes or sports, to ensure that their participation is not restricted by their clothing. Figure 3.4 shows the proportion of schools with compulsory, recommended or optional changes of clothing for PE across different levels of schooling. Secondary and primary/secondary schools are significantly more likely to require students to change for PE.¹⁶⁷ This is likely to reflect the fact that primary school uniforms tend to be less formal, and more conducive to active play. Older students are also more likely to require a change of clothes for reasons of hygiene.

Figure 3.4: Policies on changes of clothing for physical education in Victorian schools, by level (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

However, the Committee received a number of comments relating to the impact of school uniforms on unstructured physical activity among students. In the Committee's survey, one respondent advocated that uniforms be more 'practical and comfortable', so that students are 'able to be active' at school.¹⁶⁸ Mr Max Resic, a Year 6 Student from Princes Hill Primary School, expressed concern to the Committee that it is very hard to kick, play sport, or run in the black leather shoes required by his local secondary school. Mr Resic suggests that it would be a good idea to include black runners in the uniform so students can be more active.¹⁶⁹ A contribution to Parents Victoria's online school uniform forum suggested that students should be allowed to change their footwear during breaks from class:

I would really like it if my kids could both wear runners as the good quality black leather shoes are very expensive and not ideal for them to be out on the oval with the boys at lunch kicking the footy...I asked them to change into their runners at lunch but they are not allowed to.¹⁷⁰

Parent Ms Susanne McCracken also noted the impracticality of more formal school uniform items such as blazers for active students:

I 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

¹⁶⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

¹⁶⁸ Respondent, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Mr M. Resic, Year 6 Student, Princes Hill Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.22.

¹⁷⁰ Ms K. Farrall, 'Should school uniforms be compulsory?', *Parents Victoria online forum*, 10 September 2007, Parents Victoria website, <<http://www.cybertext.net.au/pv/discussion.htm>>

children do not want to wear such restrictive clothing. Even adults will discard a suit jacket at the first convenient moment.¹⁷¹

Other school uniform items noted by various participants as unsuitable for active play included skirts and dresses, hats and long-sleeved t-shirts.

Furthermore, the Committee notes a reported decline in the number of Victorian children either walking or cycling to school.¹⁷² This suggests that more could also be done to encourage this kind of non-structured regular physical activity, especially given the trend towards more sedentary leisure activities for children outside school hours. It is interesting to note that the UK education department includes light coloured and reflective clothing among its suggested safety measures for school uniforms, to address the needs of students who walk or cycle to school.¹⁷³ A flexible approach to enforcement of the uniform policy outside school hours may be another way in which students may be encouraged to try more active modes of transportation.

In light of growing concerns about childhood obesity, the Committee urges schools to promote a variety of structured and unstructured physical activity to their students, including active transport and active play. It is also recommended that schools review their uniform policies to ensure that opportunities for students to exercise are not unduly compromised by their clothing. The Committee respects the decision of some schools, especially at secondary level, to prioritise other considerations besides freedom of movement in the design of their school uniform. However, there are simple measures that all schools can take, such as permitting partial changes of clothing or footwear at lunchtime or before and after school, which may facilitate and encourage participation in moderate physical exercise among students.

Recommendation 3.5: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to consider how their school uniform policies can contribute to greater levels of physical activity among students.

Facial and Body Piercings

As noted in the previous chapter, many schools indicated that their rules about body and facial piercings are based on health and safety concerns. The Australian Medical Association reports that such piercings pose many risks, including infections, speech impediments, dental problems and breathing difficulties.¹⁷⁴ In a school context, piercings may also pose a risk to students if they are caught or otherwise interfered with during practical work, active play or physical education.

Mr Stephen Franzi-Ford, Chief Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, told the Committee that these risks are of great concern to schools, especially because the threat to student safety may not always be visible:

As far as the risk management for the school council is concerned, if we know that they have some of these piercings—and they have them in all sorts of parts of their body that we cannot see—and if, in the rough-and-tumble games that kids play at school, they are tugged on a jumper and it pulls out or rips them, then where do we sit as a governing body, knowing that these activities take place and we have said that we do not mind them wearing this sort of jewellery? That is one of our greatest concerns.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Ms S. McCracken, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

¹⁷² J. Salmon, A. Timperio, V. Cleland & A. Venn 2005, 'Trends in children's physical activity and weight status in high and low socioeconomic status areas of Melbourne, Victoria, 1985-2001', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 2005, p.340.

¹⁷³ Department for Children, Schools and Families (United Kingdom) 2007, *DCSF Guidance to Schools on School Uniform and Related Policies*, DCSF, London.

¹⁷⁴ Australian Medical Association, *Body Piercing Brochure*, available on Australian Medical Association website, <<http://www.ama.com.au/web.nsf/doc/WEEN-5Y392H>>, accessed on 27 November 2007.

¹⁷⁵ Mr S. Franzi-Ford, Chief Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.12.

Prohibiting body and facial piercings may therefore be one way in which schools fulfil their duty of care to protect their students from harm. However, it is interesting to note that most of the school uniform policies examined by the Committee make mention only of visible piercings, and not hidden piercings which may potentially also pose a health and safety risk.

As also noted previously, body and facial piercings are an especially contentious issue as they are sometimes supported by parents but banned by schools. Nevertheless, Mr Franz-Ford argued that schools' duty of care to students supersedes their duty to reflect community values with respect to piercings. He asked the Committee to request support from the Government to give schools greater leverage to enforce their piercings policies:

There are very strict compliance guidelines around how we go about asking the community to deal with clothing, but the problem we have with body jewellery is a separate issue because it is risk management, as far as we are concerned. We would love there to be stronger guidelines and support from the government with regard to these issues.¹⁷⁶

This view was supported in one of the comments to the Committee's survey:

Facial and body piercing are presenting serious issues for schools and a definitive response from the Department on the OH&S grounds would be most helpful for schools.¹⁷⁷

The Committee believes that the apparent conflict between schools' duty of care and community values regarding body piercings may warrant further direction from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Recommendation 3.6: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate the health and safety issues associated with facial and body piercings, and publish guidelines to assist school communities in developing, implementing and reviewing piercings policies.

Student Security

In its guidelines for schools, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development notes that some schools use their dress codes and school uniform policies as a means of addressing student security:

Some schools will see it as a useful element in a strategy for individual student safety and group security.¹⁷⁸

Such suggestions are echoed by other education departments in Australia: both the Queensland and WA education departments noted the advantages of school uniforms for student security in their written submissions,¹⁷⁹ and the NSW department's policy statement lists 'personal safety' as one of the key benefits of wearing a school uniform.¹⁸⁰ Many submissions from schools, students and parents supported this view, suggesting that having a uniform makes it easier to identify non-students on school grounds, or to identify school students during excursions.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

¹⁷⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

¹⁷⁹ Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland), Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Department of Education and Training (Western Australia), Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

¹⁸⁰ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniforms in New South Wales Government Schools*, DET, Sydney, p.4.

¹⁸¹ For example, Lyndale Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Glengarry Primary School Council and Staff, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Belvedere Park Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Anakie Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

'Our school, St Kilda Park Primary School, has never had a uniform...We look neat and are easily distinguishable when on excursions; our teachers have never lost any of us.'

Ruby Rees-Wemyss,
Year 6 Student, St Kilda
Park Primary School

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Schools that do not have uniforms reported mixed views on the impact of school uniforms on student security. Sandringham College acknowledged that its uniform-free policy for senior students makes it more difficult to identify non-students on school grounds, but as students carry ID cards, the school suggests this does not present a significant problem.¹⁸² At Princes Hill Secondary College, identifying non-students on campus does not cause difficulties because of the school's close-knit community:

It is pretty clear after a while, I think, who our student population is. It is fair to say that that is something that we have to continually keep an eye on, but I do not think it is such a concern that it would cause us to reflect on or alter a policy like our uniform-free approach.

...our compliance, with student cooperation, with saying, 'Oh, I just saw somebody outside the front of the school who shouldn't be there,' is very good...I do not think it is much of a concern for us at the moment.¹⁸³

Ms Jacinta Cashen, President, Victorian Council of School Organisations, supported the view that school culture is more important than a uniform in enhancing security:

...if you have got a rock-solid community and you have really focused on building community, then you do know who is in the grounds that are not normally in the grounds. It does not matter whether they have got a uniform on or not. It does not seem to have been a particularly big issue.¹⁸⁴

One student from Surfside Primary School added an interesting perspective by suggesting that wearing a school uniform could actually put students at risk:

Being easy to identify could also pose a risk to a child because it makes it obvious to predators where the child attends school.¹⁸⁵

The Committee acknowledges that for some schools, a well-developed and enforced school uniform policy may enhance certain aspects of student security. However, the Committee also notes that student security may be addressed in a variety of other ways. All schools, regardless of their dress code or uniform policy, have an equal responsibility for identifying potential risks to student security and taking appropriate steps to minimise them.

School Bags

The Committee believes that back care is an important matter to be addressed by schools that include a school bag in their dress codes and school uniform policies. The Victorian Government's Better Health Channel reports that around 70 per cent of Victorian school students may be damaging their spines by carrying school bags.¹⁸⁶ According to the Better Health Channel, risks include muscle strain, distortion of the natural 'S' curve of the spine and rounding of the shoulders.¹⁸⁷

New Generation Print & Copy reported to the Committee that thousands of students are affected by back pain, muscle fatigue and poor posture because they either do not fit or carry their heavily loaded backpacks correctly, or choose to use unsuitable fashion day packs.¹⁸⁸ It argued that secondary schools should implement a policy permitting the use of 'student safe' backpacks, such as the new backpack recently developed by the company:

¹⁸² Sandringham College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

¹⁸³ Mr J. Goodman, Assistant Principal, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.21.

¹⁸⁴ Ms J. Cashen, President, Victorian Council of School Organisations, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.26.

¹⁸⁵ Ms D. Neal, Year 6 Student, Surfside Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.12.

¹⁸⁶ Victorian Government Better Health Channel website, <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Back_pain_schoolbags?Open>, viewed on 22 November 2007.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ New Generation Print & Copy, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

New Generation has just completed development of the world's first student backpack that cannot be fitted or carried incorrectly ensuring future generations of students equipped with our G-Force College Backpack can safely transport their books to and from school without being at risk of posture or spinal damage.¹⁸⁹

The Committee notes that other companies also produce school bags that offer spinal protection for students. For example, the Committee's analysis of 60 school uniform policies found that some schools include the 'Chiropak' in their school uniform policies, a backpack produced by Spartan School Supplies and endorsed by the Chiropractors Association of Australia.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, a recent news article reported that Spartan School Supplies has also collaborated with the Australian Physiotherapy Association and the University of South Australia to research and develop another backpack, Physiopak, which was designed to limit postural response to weight load.¹⁹¹

In the Committee's survey, schools were asked whether they include an ergonomic school bag for their students as part of their dress code or uniform policy. The Committee found that around half (51.4%) of Victorian schools, including 34.1 per cent of government schools, require or recommend an ergonomic school bag for their students.¹⁹² The Committee did not, however, ask schools to identify their criteria for determining the ergonomic qualities of a bag and accepts that interpretations of this standard may differ between schools.

The Committee notes the Better Health Channel's recommendation that parents purchase a school bag that is endorsed by an Australian professional organisation, such as the Australian Physiotherapy Association or the Chiropractors' Association of Australia.¹⁹³ The Committee believes that all Victorian students should be given the opportunity to use a school bag that offers appropriate levels of spinal protection. The Committee notes that in order to achieve this, some schools may need further guidance on the issue, to ensure that the bag they select provides students with the best possible spinal protection. Galvin Park Secondary College noted in its submission that it allows complete flexibility with respect to school bags, resulting in some students electing to use a rolling case or backpack.¹⁹⁴ The Committee also notes that schools may consider further strategies for addressing back care, such as minimising the need for students to carry heavy loads to and from school.

Recommendation 3.7: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish guidelines to assist schools in making appropriate decisions about school bags when developing and reviewing their dress codes and school uniform policies. Such guidelines may also include standards relating to the weight of materials students are expected to carry to and from school.

Cords and Chin Straps

While there is no doubt about the value of hats in protecting students from the sun, the Committee heard a concern that sun hats and other items of clothing with long cords may sometimes put student safety at risk. Kidsafe, the child accident prevention foundation of Australia, reports that 82 children died in the United States in 1999 from accidental strangulation due to items such as chinstraps,

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

¹⁹¹ J. Cafarella, 'Bags a health burden for students', *The Age*, 21 May 2007.

¹⁹² Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September, 2007.

¹⁹³ Victorian Government Better Health Channel website, <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Back_pain_schoolbags?Open>, viewed on 22 November 2007.

¹⁹⁴ Galvin Park Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

bicycle helmets and drawstrings on clothing (eg. hats, coats, sweatshirts) being caught on playground equipment.¹⁹⁵

Mr Anthony Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, told the Committee that chinstraps on hats can be especially dangerous to primary school children who are the most likely to wear hats during active outdoor play:

Over the years, we have seen children suffer significant injuries to their chins, due to rope burns when their approved SunSmart slouch hats get caught on things like playground equipment, fences, trees et cetera.¹⁹⁶

One primary student also noted that chinstraps can present a safety risk when 'other children pull the cord tight' during active play.¹⁹⁷ Recognising such risks, Kidsafe recommends that parents consider strategies to shorten or remove cords and chinstraps from their children's hats. However, PSW Pty Ltd sees problems with this solution:

By cutting off straps, the hat may not sit properly or parents may be faced with having to purchase multiple hats if it falls off the child and is lost... This also creates scenarios where hats may fly off in the wind, for example, and children chase them onto the road...¹⁹⁸

PSW Pty Ltd's response has been the development of a 'safety slouch hat,' which releases the chinstrap when two kilos or more of pressure is applied.¹⁹⁹ The Committee welcomes such initiatives and encourages schools and parents to consider the various options for ensuring the safe wearing of sun hats, while also remaining vigilant in their supervision of young children, particularly in the playground where such accidents are likely to occur.

Recommendation 3.8: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development incorporate information regarding cords and chinstraps on sun hats and other articles of clothing in their safety guidelines for schools, especially at a primary level.

Conclusion

The Committee notes that most, if not all, Victorian schools address a range of health and safety issues in their dress codes and school uniform policies. Even schools that do not have uniforms typically place some restrictions on student clothing for health and safety reasons, such as suitable footwear or sun-protective clothing. The issue of student health and safety therefore transcends the school uniform debate in many areas, with schools both with and without uniforms agreeing on the importance of implementing standards for safe clothing.

As demonstrated in evidence to this inquiry, numerous opportunities exist for well thought-out school uniform policies to contribute to student health and wellbeing at school. While some health and safety issues, including sun protection, are widely recognised in Victorian schools, the Committee notes that some schools may not be familiar with additional measures they may take to support student health and safety. In the Committee's view, the enhancements to departmental guidelines recommended in this chapter could assist schools to understand a greater range of possibilities available for supporting student health and safety through their dress codes and school uniform policies.

¹⁹⁵ Kidsafe ACT Inc n.d., 'Sunhat Cords and Playground Equipment', *Fact Sheet*. Copy supplied by PSW Pty Ltd, 16 July 2007.

¹⁹⁶ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.3.

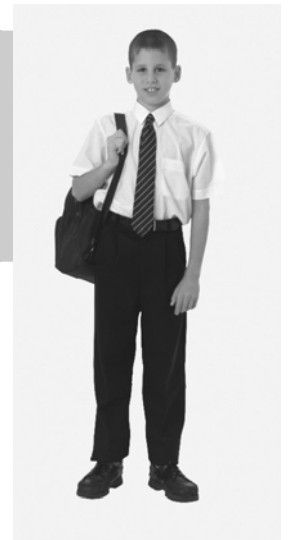
¹⁹⁷ Ms D. Neal, Year 6 Student, Surfside Primary School, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.12.

¹⁹⁸ PSW Pty Ltd 'Aussie first hat innovation designed for child safety' n.d., *Media Release*. Copy supplied by PSW Pty Ltd, 16 July 2007.

¹⁹⁹ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.3.

Chapter 4:

Anti-discrimination Issues



Introduction

It is inevitable, when you prescribe a one-pattern-fits-all, that some people will be helped and some people will be heavily disadvantaged.²⁰⁰

Anti-discrimination law rests on a tension between two understandings of equality: 'as sameness...or as allowing difference'.²⁰¹ The Committee found that this tension is reflected in the various ways in which Victorian schools interpret equality and anti-discrimination issues in their dress codes and school uniform policies. Many schools with compulsory uniforms believe that they are promoting equality by removing or obscuring the differences between students that may otherwise be accentuated by their clothing.²⁰² At the same time, schools without uniforms also argue that they promote equality by permitting everyone to be unique, as summed up by Princes Hill Secondary College: 'Everyone is equal, precisely because everybody is different'.²⁰³ While their interpretations of equality may differ, the promotion of equality and prevention of discrimination are thus important concerns for all Victorian schools.

It is clear to the Committee that discrimination will sometimes be avoided by treating all students equally; and at other times by providing exceptional treatment for certain individuals or groups. Both these alternatives are evident in the following discussion of the legal and political context surrounding anti-discrimination issues, and the subsequent review of the anti-discrimination issues that were raised in evidence to this inquiry.

Legal and Political Context

The key legal instrument for the prevention of discrimination in Victoria is the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*, which prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably because they have, or are assumed to have, any of a list of particular attributes, called 'protected attributes' for the purposes of the legislation. Indirect discrimination occurs when a condition or requirement is applied to a group of people, some of whom are unable to comply because they have a protected attribute. In such a situation, it must also be demonstrated that the condition or requirement is unreasonable for discrimination to have occurred.

Section 6 of the *Equal Opportunity Act* lists the protected attributes on which discrimination is prohibited in Victoria. Attributes that may be relevant to dress codes and school uniforms include age; race; religious or political belief or activity; sex and gender identity; impairment; physical features; and pregnancy. Section 37 of the Act makes special provisions prohibiting discrimination on these grounds in the area of education, covering virtually all aspects of the relationships and interactions between schools and their students.

²⁰⁰ Mr D. Wilkinson, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.31.

²⁰¹ B. Gaze 1999, 'The Ambiguity of Affirmative Action in Australia', *Law in Context*, Vol. 15, No. 2, p.145.

²⁰² For example, Ranfurly Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Lyndale Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Carrum Primary School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

²⁰³ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.8.

'Promoting equality through the school community is vital in minimising discrimination on the basis of clothing and image. The uniform policy at Melbourne Girls' College ensures that students are not defined or judged by the clothes that they wear but are celebrated for their talents and unique personalities.'

Erika Codognotto, Year 11 Student, Melbourne Girls' College

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

However, section 40(1) of the Act provides a specific exception relating to school dress codes and uniform policies, as well as rules for student behaviour:

- 1) An educational authority may set and enforce reasonable standards of dress, appearance and behaviour for students.
- 2) In relation to a school, without limiting the generality of what constitutes a reasonable standard of dress, appearance or behaviour, a standard must be taken to be reasonable if the educational authority administering the school has taken into account the views of the school community in setting the standard.

The exception was inserted due to concerns that school students would invoke the legislation against any school rules that they viewed as 'too restrictive or unreasonable'.²⁰⁴ It was noted that schools would regard such rules as 'essential for maintaining school discipline', and that this stance would usually be supported by the school communities. The exception represents an attempt to balance the rights of schools to set rules and standards, against the individual rights of their students.²⁰⁵

In the Committee's view, the exception does not mean that schools do not need to consider anti-discrimination issues in their dress codes and school uniform policies. Dr Helen Szoke, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, explained to the Committee that considerable uncertainty still exists about how the law may be applied in practice:

It will be a challenge for you and it will be a challenge for us if the matter comes before us as a discrimination complaint, but basically the imprecise nature of the terminology in the section 40 provisions around reasonableness is to take into account the views of the school community. How that is applied and the level of detail that applies in that regard has not really been tested, if you like, with any judicial interpretation.²⁰⁶

While the wording of the Act may be imprecise, the Committee believes it is unlikely to extend to policies that are openly discriminatory.

Any policy developed by a 'public authority' in Victoria, including a government school, is also now required to comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* (the *Human Rights Charter*). The *Human Rights Charter* makes a number of provisions relevant to anti-discrimination issues that may be relevant to dress codes and school uniform policies. For instance, Section 8 provides that 'Every person has the right to enjoy his or her human rights without discrimination'. The *Human Rights Charter* also provides for a number of rights relating to freedom of thought, expression, religion and culture.

Nevertheless, section 7 of the *Human Rights Charter* provides that any of these rights may be subject to 'such reasonable limits as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society'. School dress codes and uniform policies may be considered to be among such reasonable limits. The reasonableness of a limit must take account of various factors, such as the importance of the limitation, the nature of the right, and whether any less restrictive measures are available to achieve the same purpose.

In May 2007, the Committee wrote to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission and equivalent bodies interstate, seeking information about any enquiries or complaints concerning dress codes or uniform policies in schools. It appears that very few such issues are brought before the various anti-discrimination bodies: New South Wales reported two complaints over the period 2001 to 2007, Western Australia reported one case since 1997 and both Tasmania and the Northern Territory reported there have been no complaints of this nature

²⁰⁴ Hon J. Wade MP, Attorney-General, Victoria, *Second Reading, Equal Opportunity Bill*, Legislative Assembly, Hansard, 4 May 1995, p.1249.

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Dr H. Szoke, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.20.

lodged. The South Australian Commissioner for Equal Opportunity did not quantify complaints but outlined a small number of typical examples of claims of discrimination, while the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission reported eight enquiries or complaints involving school uniforms for the period 1998 to 2007.

Typical issues brought before the Victorian and interstate bodies include:

- age discrimination (uniform policy applied differently depending on year level);
- gender discrimination (girls being required to wear skirts; more restrictive hair or jewellery requirements for boys);
- religious discrimination (students being asked to remove jewellery or other items with religious significance); and
- physical features discrimination (two cases in Victoria of students being suspended for having visible facial piercings).

While few complaints of discrimination in dress codes and school uniform policies are brought before the various anti-discrimination bodies, the Committee is aware that many similar allegations are dealt with by schools and departmental education officers on a daily basis.²⁰⁷ Periodically, this type of conflict is also raised in the media, often damaging the image of the students, parents or school personnel involved in the dispute.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development makes a general reference to the relevant anti-discrimination legislation in its guidelines on student dress codes, and lists some of the grounds on which it may apply:

The implications of equal opportunity legislation are such that schools may be required to publicly demonstrate that their [uniform] policy is not discriminatory. With regard to a dress code, schools cannot discriminate, either directly or indirectly, against students on the basis of their sex, race, ethnic group, nationality, religious beliefs, marital status, colour or disability.²⁰⁸

The document goes on to address the different approaches schools will need to adopt to prevent both direct and indirect discrimination.²⁰⁹ Direct discrimination, for the Department, is avoided by making rules that 'apply consistently to all students'. Indirect discrimination, or 'the unequal impact of apparently neutral rules on students of different backgrounds', is to be avoided through the use of individual exemptions.

The guidelines go on to identify specific circumstances in which 'legal requirements necessitate that grounds of exemption must be provided'.²¹⁰ These are: religious belief; ethnic or cultural background; disability; health condition; and the demonstration of 'particular economic hardship'. The Committee notes that the Department's list differs from the list of protected attributes named in the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*. The Committee also notes that the departmental guidelines require updating to include advice about the implications for government schools of the introduction of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

The Committee also heard that anti-discrimination law is promoted in the non-government education sector. The Catholic Education Commission of Victoria noted in its written submission that the Melbourne Archdiocese provides advice to schools upon request regarding compliance with the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*.²¹¹ Similarly, Mr Andrew Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, told the Committee that the Association will 'quite often'

²⁰⁷ Information supplied by the regional offices of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in response to a request from the Education and Training Committee for data on the number and type of cases and complaints associated with dress codes and school uniforms over the period January 2005 to June 2007.

²⁰⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

respond to queries relating to what is appropriate policy under equal opportunity legislation.²¹²

The Committee concurs that schools should seek to ensure that their dress codes and school uniform policies are non-discriminatory. Schools should do so both to mitigate legal risk, and to reflect and promote values of equality and respect in their communities. The following discussion outlines some of the major anti-discrimination issues that have arisen in submissions to this inquiry, which schools may need to address in their dress codes and uniform policies.

Recommendation 4.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, publish guidelines to clarify schools' legal obligations under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*. Such guidelines should include:

- detailed advice on legal requirements and how these are best implemented in practice;
- greater clarity regarding the legal rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community with respect to dress codes and school uniform policies; and
- specific examples of relevant case law to support general legal advice.

Gender and Gender Identity

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development recognises gender differences in dress codes and school uniform policies as an area of risk with respect to discrimination. The Department's guidelines state that:

School councils are... advised to formulate, as far as practicable, dress code requirements that are similar for both sexes. In general, where options are to be available, they should be available to both boys and girls.²¹³

The Committee recognises that school uniforms with gender-specific options would not necessarily be discriminatory. Discrimination issues only arise where differences in gendered uniforms advantage one group over another. The Committee found several examples in evidence to the inquiry where this may be the case.

As Dr Helen Szoke, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, told the Committee, school uniforms that involve a significant price differential between items for boys and girls items may constitute direct sex discrimination.²¹⁴ In its review of Victorian school uniform price lists, the Committee noted some examples where girls are required to wear a 'dress hat' costing \$50 or more, while boys at the same school are able to wear an inexpensive legionnaire style hat.²¹⁵ The Committee also found that items such as woollen tunics and kilts are frequently far more costly than the items required for male students at the same schools (refer Chapter 6 for further information on costs of school uniforms in Victorian schools). While the Committee recognises that the durability of these garments may offset the purchasing cost, schools are advised to seek to minimise the impact of gender-specific items on the overall cost of school uniforms.

²¹² Mr A. Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.33.

²¹³ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

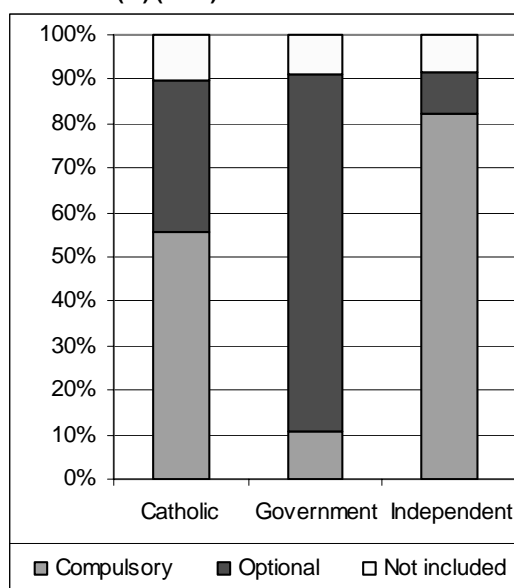
²¹⁴ Dr H. Szoke, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, pp.19-20.

²¹⁵ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

The Committee also heard concerns that a requirement for girls to wear skirts or dresses may constitute a form of gender discrimination.²¹⁶ The Committee's survey found that 39.5 per cent of Victorian schools require girls to wear skirts or dresses in summer, and 31.0 per cent require girls to wear skirts or dresses in winter.²¹⁷ Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show that these requirements differ significantly across education sectors.

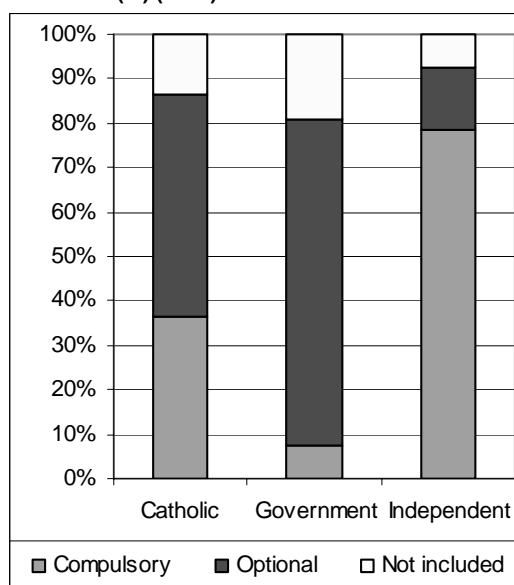
Girls are most likely to be required to wear skirts or dresses in both summer and winter at independent schools, and least likely to have such requirements in the government sector. This may reflect the tendency for independent schools to adopt more traditional uniform designs, and for government schools to choose less traditional and more practical garments. Girls are slightly more likely to be required to wear skirts or dresses in summer than in winter in all sectors. Another finding of note is that all of the single-sex girls schools that participated in the survey require their students to wear skirts or dresses in summer, and only a small proportion provides other options in their winter uniform. Most of these schools are in the independent or Catholic sectors.²¹⁸

Figure 4.1: Policies on skirts or dresses for girls in summer in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Figure 4.2: Policies on skirts or dresses for girls in winter in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²¹⁶ For example, Ms Trudy Little, Parent, Written Submission, March 2007, p.1; Grey Street Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Ms L. Forrest, Year 11 Student, University High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.9.

²¹⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

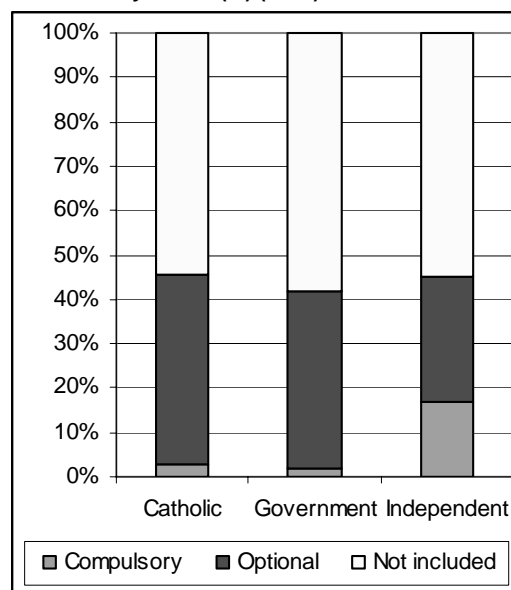
'What type of world do we live in where girls sometimes are not even allowed to wear pants? Do you realise how cold it gets on public transport at 7.30 a.m. when you are only wearing tights? What is it with boys not being allowed to have their hair longer than the collar? That is not only sexist, it is archaic.'

Lizzie Forrest, Year 11 Student, University High School

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

The Committee heard concerns that being required to wear a dress or skirt may constrain girls' participation in some school activities, especially physical education.²¹⁹ Figure 4.3 shows that significantly fewer schools require girls to wear skirts or dresses for PE classes than for normal school activities, indicating that most girls are being given opportunities to change into more suitable clothing.²²⁰ However, as noted in the previous chapter, children may also engage in unscheduled physical activity during the school day, through active play or active transport. The Committee therefore encourages schools to consider whether the requirement for girls to wear skirts or dresses may compromise their participation in activities such as cycling to and from school, lunchtime sports and other physical activities in the playground.

Figure 4.3: Policies on skirts or dresses for girls during PE classes in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

A number of measures are available to schools to address this potential inequality. Schools with compulsory skirts or dresses could permit female students to wear a sports uniform or other alternative clothing during lunchtime, or on the way to and from school. One school reported that it permits girls to wear the school sports shorts underneath their tunics,²²¹ while another includes a 'skort' in its girls uniform (shorts that have a front covering to resemble a skirt).²²² The Committee notes that many schools, particularly in the government sector, give girls the option to either wear skirts or dresses, or shorts or trousers similar to those worn by boys. The Committee agrees that choice may be the most important factor in equality for female students, as it should not be assumed that all girls have the same preferences. Girls may feel equally strongly about wearing a skirt or a dress to express their femininity, as they do about wearing shorts or trousers to facilitate their participation in physical activity.

The issue was also raised with the Committee as to whether boys should be given the choice to wear the same items available to girls. Although no submissions to the inquiry reported incidents of male students dressing in girls uniforms, one school noted in its written submission that this 'could conceivably be a problem one day'.²²³ The Committee believes that such a scenario goes beyond considerations of equality between the sexes, and raises more complex issues around student sexual orientation or gender identity; also both protected attributes under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*. Mr Matthew Carroll, Manager, Human Rights Unit, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, explained to the Committee that any such situations would require delicate handling:

The fundamental obligation under the Equal Opportunity Act to students who are transgender or intersex is to provide a safe and supportive schooling environment.

²¹⁹ For example, Hawkesdale P-12 College School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

²²⁰ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²²¹ Ms S. Porzig, Acting Principal, Swan Marsh Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

²²² Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²²³ Trafalgar Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

There will be a number of issues to work through there of which uniform will be one of the most visibly pressing but needing to be managed within the context of a range of other issues as well.²²⁴

As this area is yet to be tested, the Committee advises that such situations be left to the sensitivity and discretion of individual schools, students and families. The Committee does not feel that such complex issues need to be specifically addressed in schools' dress codes or uniform policies at this point in time.

The Committee is also aware that dress codes and school uniform policies may include other standards for student appearance that may be perceived as discriminatory on the basis of gender. In 1995, the Victorian Anti-Discrimination Tribunal (now the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission) heard a case from a male student who had been suspended from school for refusing to cut his hair to the length specified for boys: 'collar length at a maximum'. The case for the student argued that the school did not restrict hair length for girls, and the policy was therefore discriminatory. The school argued that the policy was aimed at fostering neatness in the school, and although it differentiated between the sexes, it did not treat them unequally.²²⁵

While acknowledging that the school may have had 'the best of motives' for its student appearance policy, the Tribunal found in favour of the student.²²⁶ The case shows that equality between the sexes is far from straightforward, and that even a well-intentioned school uniform policy may be inadvertently discriminatory. The Committee therefore advises schools to take special care to consider gender equality in standards relating to student dress and appearance.

Recommendation 4.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish detailed guidelines relating to the prevention of gender discrimination in dress codes and school uniform policies, including guidelines for student appearance, and clothing choices for female students.

Age

Many schools include items in their uniforms that differ in style or price depending on age group. The Committee found that in most cases, such differences do not constitute discrimination. Different clothing options for different year levels can be a source of pride for students, as markers of progress towards maturity and seniority in the school. Growing students will also inevitably require larger clothing sizes over the course of their schooling, and it may reasonably be expected that this will result in an increase in the price of a school uniform.

The Committee did, however, hear concerns regarding age discrimination, where one student group was thought to be unfairly disadvantaged. The Committee received a series of written submissions from parents of students at one secondary college, outlining concerns about the school's decision to introduce a compulsory blazer for year 7 students.²²⁷ Although the school indicated that the blazer is to be phased in for other year levels over time, the parents are concerned that the high cost of the blazer unfairly penalises year 7 students and their families. Furthermore, they argue that the school's strict enforcement of the blazer policy constitutes discriminatory treatment of year 7 students in the school.

²²⁴ Mr M. Carroll, Manager, Human Rights Unit, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.25.

²²⁵ *Cope v Girton Grammar School Limited* [1995] VADT 2.

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ Ms M. Reith, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007; Ms C. Mann, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007; Ms L. McCurdy, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007; Ms B. Johns, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007; Ms K. Clarke & Mr L. Challis, Parents, Written Submission, June 2007; Ms K. Rolands, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007.

The parents took their complaint to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission in 2007, but the case was declined as 'misconceived'.²²⁸ In supplementary material provided to the Committee, the Commission explained the meaning of the term:

...while conduct has occurred that would otherwise be discriminatory, an exception in the legislation renders the conduct lawful.²²⁹

As noted earlier in this chapter, section 40(1) of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* provides an exception for schools' standards of student dress and appearance, providing such standards are 'reasonable' and based on community consultation. In the above case, the parents are engaged in ongoing communication with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development over whether there was sufficient consultation during development of the school's blazer policy.²³⁰

Mature age students may also have special needs with respect to school uniform policies. Although the Committee did not receive any submissions from adult students in the course of this inquiry, a 1991 research paper suggests that adult students returning to school may have mixed feelings about wearing a school uniform. Some adult students reported that being dressed similarly to other students 'greatly assisted them in feeling "comfortable" and "part of" the school culture'.²³¹ Other adult students resisted uniforms strongly:

...some noted their prior experiences as adult students in schools where uniform was worn by senior pupils and their feelings of 'exclusion' – not being part of the school pupil group nor the staff. Such was this concern, that some stated that had uniform been in force...they would not have returned to school.²³²

South Australia is the only jurisdiction in Australia to provide specific advice regarding adult students in its policy statement on dress codes and school uniforms:

Councils may need to address the issue of the increasing number of students of post-compulsory age in schools. Canvassing opinion and careful consultation will be necessary in determining the most appropriate dress code for this group.²³³

The Committee encourages Victorian schools to consider the needs of mature age students when developing and reviewing their dress codes or school uniform policies.

Physical Attributes

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development lists student disabilities and any special health conditions among the grounds on which schools must provide exemptions to their dress codes and school uniform policies.²³⁴ The *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* lists a number of physical attributes as prohibited grounds for discrimination, including impairment, physical features and pregnancy. For the purposes of this inquiry, the Committee has chosen to address these issues collectively, because of their relatively uncontroversial nature with respect to dress codes and uniform policies in schools. Nevertheless, the Committee recognises that the term 'physical attributes' may encompass a wide range of

²²⁸ Ms B. Johns, Parent, Supplementary Submission, October 2007, p.5.

²²⁹ Supplementary Material provided to the Committee by Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, June 2007, p.2.

²³⁰ Ms B. Johns, Parent, Supplementary Submission, October 2007.

²³¹ B. Cocklin 1991, 'Adult Re-entry to Secondary School: the experience and implications', paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, Gold Coast, 26–30 November 1991.

²³² *ibid.*

²³³ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) 2007, *Administrative Instructions and Guidelines*, May 2007, DECS, Adelaide, p.108.

²³⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

permanent and temporary physical features and conditions, and that each one will give rise to unique needs relating to student clothing.

The Committee found that over three-quarters of Victorian schools would permit a full or partial exemption to their dress code or uniform policy for students with special needs arising from an injury, health condition or physical disability.²³⁵ However, 16.0 per cent indicated that they would not permit an exemption for a physical disability and 10.1 per cent would not exempt students for injuries and health conditions. Body shape was even less likely to be seen as valid grounds for an exemption, with only 37.7 per cent of schools stating that exemptions would be permitted and 58.2 per cent stating that they would not.²³⁶

The number of schools that do not permit exemptions based on physical attributes may appear high, but comments from schools suggest that this may not reflect a lack of accommodation of students' needs. Ten schools commented that their uniform had been purposefully selected to cater for a range of body shapes, sizes or physical attributes. In addition, eight schools made the point that their uniform could be modified or custom-made to accommodate special physical needs.²³⁷ It therefore appears that many schools are accommodating physical attributes in their dress codes or school uniforms at the design phase, rather than through their exemptions policies. The Committee commends such approaches, which seek to provide equal access to the school uniform for a diverse range of students.

The Committee heard concerns regarding the allergies that many students have to certain textiles. Parents Victoria reported that many students are allergic to synthetic fabrics and, that as uniforms are rarely available in 100 per cent natural fibres, the special needs of these students need to be addressed in school uniform policies.²³⁸ The Committee also heard examples of students being allergic to wool, and noted that some schools supply alternative garments in such cases.²³⁹ The Committee also notes that this issue is readily addressed by some schools, particularly in the government sector, by the inclusion of a wide choice of garments within the school uniform. For example, some schools allow students the choice of a woollen jumper or school windcheater and/or the choice of skirts and trousers made in different fabrics.²⁴⁰

Religion, Ethnicity and Culture

The Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines state that exemptions to dress codes and school uniform policies must be provided where a student's religious, ethnic or cultural background may be compromised:

Legal requirements necessitate that grounds of exemption must be provided where:

- An aspect of the code offends a religious belief held by the student/parents/guardians
- An aspect of the code prevents the student from complying with a requirement of their ethnic or cultural background.²⁴¹

The Committee did not find that culture or ethnicity in themselves present any current concerns for dress codes or uniform policies in Victorian schools, distinct from those discussed with respect to religion. For example, Dr Mark Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc,

²³⁵ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ *ibid.*

²³⁸ Parents Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.3.

²³⁹ Respondents, *Education and Training Committee, Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁴⁰ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

²⁴¹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

'The wearing of significant and reasonable religious or cultural attire can be of the utmost importance to the self-identity of students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.'

Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

indicated that there are no particular issues around dress codes or school uniforms in terms of Australian indigenous culture:

...if I was the kid, if I had to come up with an excuse, I would probably throw that one on the table. We cannot see [a uniform issue] that would be a cultural barrier. An economic barrier, yes; because of cultural imperatives, maybe, but no.²⁴²

Written submissions from the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and the Victorian Multicultural Commission also focused on the wearing of items with religious significance, as well as school uniform costs, as the most significant considerations for culturally diverse communities in Victoria.²⁴³

Victoria is home to people of many religions, many of whom are required by their faith to wear particular garments or other items. The Committee found that 6.1 per cent of schools currently have students exempted from their uniform policy on the basis of religion or culture and that 49.2 per cent would allow such an exemption if requested.²⁴⁴ From the comments provided in the survey, it appears to the Committee that many more have simply not been confronted with the issue of exemptions based on religious grounds and would be likely to negotiate such requests case-by-case. The Committee nevertheless heard of some examples where items with religious significance were not permitted and some where such items have become the subject of disputes.²⁴⁵ As Victoria's multicultural population increases, an increasing number of schools are likely to be faced with the need to incorporate garments with religious significance into their dress codes and school uniform policies. The discussion below addresses the two items that were mentioned most frequently in submissions to this inquiry: the hijab (Islamic headscarf) and the kirpan (Sikh ceremonial sword).

The Hijab and other Islamic Clothing

The case of the hijab in France demonstrates the power of school dress codes to reflect or challenge community values. In 2004, the French Government passed a law forbidding the wearing of signs or behaviours by which students openly express a religious affiliation.²⁴⁶ While the law covers all kinds of items with religious significance including yarmulke (skullcaps) and crucifixes, it is widely thought to be targeted at Islamic apparel, especially the hijab.²⁴⁷

Proponents of the controversial law typically regard the wearing of Islamic clothing as a barrier to the integration of Muslim populations into European societies. Other arguments in favour of the law describe it as an assertion of secularity in French schools and society, and of France's commitment to equality between the sexes. Critics of the policy have accused the government of fostering anti-Muslim sentiment, restricting personal freedom and forcing Muslim girls to choose between

²⁴² Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.27.

²⁴³ Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria, Written Submission, May 2007; Victorian Multicultural Commission, Written Submission, May 2007.

²⁴⁴ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁴⁵ Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, Written Submission, August 2007, p.2; Ms S. Hassan, Executive Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.37; K. Healey, 'Crucifix banned by school', *Herald Sun*, 20 August 2006.

²⁴⁶ République Française, *Loi 2004-228 15 Mars 2004*, Legifrance website, <<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/WAspad/Visu?cid=233283&indice=1&table=LEGI&ligneDeb=1>>, accessed on 25 September 2007.

²⁴⁷ N. Choudry 2007, 'From the Stasi Commission to the European Court of Human Rights: l'affaire du foulard and the challenge of protecting the rights of Muslim girls', *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 16.1, Winter 2007, p.199.

their education and their faith.²⁴⁸ For some commentators, any kind of government intervention in the matter of headscarves is problematic:

It is more than time that French...officials hold up their own practices to the same critical scrutiny they use to examine and judge foreign cultures. For no matter what one thinks about the veil, forcing women to take it off is no better than forcing them to wear it; both ways are discriminatory and undemocratic.²⁴⁹

Whatever its justification, the law has created bitter rifts both within and between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in France.

The Committee received a number of submissions arguing against a similar ban in Victorian schools. Many of these came from organisations representing culturally and linguistically diverse communities. These included the Victorian Multicultural Commission, Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and representation at a public hearing from the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues.

Several schools also addressed the issue of Islamic clothing. The Committee found that a number of schools make provisions for Muslim girls to wear hijabs through a simple statement in their uniform policy that they must be in school uniform colours.²⁵⁰ The Committee notes that such compromises may also occur informally as a gesture of goodwill, as demonstrated by the following comment from a written submission provided by the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals:

We do not stress the colour of hijab that is acceptable, but most girls choose school colours anyway, thus demonstrating their willingness to be a part of our school culture.²⁵¹

The Committee notes that other schools also provide additional options to meet Muslim students' preferences for modesty in dress, by including longer skirts or shirts with longer sleeves in their uniforms. The Committee observes that these choices might also help to accommodate the preferences of non-Muslim students.

The Committee notes that participation in sport can present particular difficulties for Muslim girls. The Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria recommends that schools accommodate Islamic dress requirements in PE classes, including headscarves and loose-fitting clothing, so that Muslim girls may participate with confidence:

Young women should be offered a range of options to facilitate their participation in as many school activities as possible. For some young women, school will be their only opportunity to access many of the resources Australian society provides.²⁵²

This view was supported in public hearings by representatives of the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and the Islamic Council of Victoria.²⁵³ Ms Sherene Hassan, Executive Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria, noted that many designers are now making sports clothing and swimwear that complies with Islamic requirements for modesty.²⁵⁴ Just as headscarves have been successfully

²⁴⁸ For example, 'French law on secularity and conspicuous religious symbols in schools', All Experts website, <http://en.allexperts.com/e/fr/fr/french_law_on_secularity_and_conspicuous_religious_symbols_in_schools.htm>, accessed on 30 March 2007.

²⁴⁹ Ms R. El Habti, KARAMAH: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights, cited in N. Choudry 2007, 'From the Stasi Commission to the European Court of Human Rights: l'affaire du foulard and the challenge of protecting the rights of Muslim girls', *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 16.1, Winter 2007, p.199.

²⁵⁰ For example, Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007; Whittlesea Secondary College, Written Submission, July 2007, p.2; Shepparton High School, *Uniform Policy*, Shepparton High School website, <http://shs.vic.edu.au/parent_information/policies/uniform/uniform.htm>.

²⁵¹ Principal, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.5.

²⁵² Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, Written Submission, August 2007, p.1.

²⁵³ Ms N. Mohamed, Project Officer, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.29; Ms S. Hassan, Executive Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.38.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*

'Muslim girls are able to wear a hijab and long dress in school colours as part of our uniform. This inclusion has allowed these students to feel part of the school community and we have not experienced problems with other students regarding these additions.'

Merrilands College
School Council

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

incorporated into many school uniforms, the Committee is optimistic that schools will be able to make the necessary accommodations in their sports uniforms to further meet the needs of Muslim students.

Ms Leanne McGaw, Coordinator, Youth Participation Programs, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, observed, however, that acceptance of the hijab in a school uniform policy is not in itself sufficient to create an environment of religious tolerance in the school:

I guess anecdotes we have heard from young people in schools are that they do get teased about...the colour of the hijab or for wearing it, which causes them considerable distress and also pressure for them then to feel like they have to conform into the mainstream community...or the opposite can happen where they will absolutely not conform, and then therefore they become more hostile and defensive and isolated.²⁵⁵

Nor are negative attitudes to Islamic clothing necessarily confined to students. Ms Sherene Hassan, Executive Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria, noted that Islamic values may conflict with the values or principles of those who teach Muslim students:

...it might be that a school's policy...embraces or accepts the hijab as part of its uniform, but members of staff might have concerns about the hijab and perceive it to be a symbol of oppression. Those members of staff might make disparaging comments towards the female students who choose to wear the headscarf. That might be an issue if the sentiment is not consistent with the school policy.²⁵⁶

This perspective reflects certain arguments in support of the French legislation, which have described Muslim headscarves as a 'symbol of oppression' and an enforced 'act of submission'.²⁵⁷ Proponents of these arguments in France have contended that the ban has helped emancipate some Muslim women.²⁵⁸

Ms Nadia Mohamed, Project Officer, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, made the observation that not all Muslims in Victoria approach the hijab in the same way:

I used to take off my scarf when I was playing my softball or basketball...whereas there are some families that would be like, 'No, you definitely wear it.' There has to be recognition by the staff of how different, diverse it is within the Muslim community, how diverse they are.²⁵⁹

As with all items of religious significance, consideration of the wearing of the hijab and other Islamic clothing in schools must be accompanied by an understanding of the broader issues that accompany them. A written submission from the Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria indicated that wearing the hijab presents many complex challenges for Muslim women in Victorian communities:

...the wearing of the hijab accompanies many associated issues that schools must be cognisant of. Within the broader community, young women who wear the hijab are more vulnerable to racial violence and taunts. Within the Muslim community, the cultural and political dynamics and pressures on Muslim women who don't wear the hijab is definitely a developing trend that needs to be monitored. In both cases, young women bear the brunt of issues in the broader community.²⁶⁰

The Committee encourages schools to work with Muslim students and their communities to understand the issues surrounding the hijab and other Islamic attire, and determine the best ways to accommodate the needs of Muslim students within their dress codes and school uniform policies.

²⁵⁵ Ms L. McGaw, Coordinator of Youth Participation Programs, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.29.

²⁵⁶ Ms S. Hassan, Executive Secretary, Islamic Council of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.37.

²⁵⁷ N. Choudry 2007, 'From the Stasi Commission to the European Court of Human Rights: l'affaire du foulard and the challenge of protecting the rights of Muslim girls', *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*, 16.1, Winter 2007, p.200.

²⁵⁸ E. Bryant, 'Europe draws battle lines on head scarves', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 October 2006, p.A17.

²⁵⁹ Ms N. Mohamed, Project Officer, Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.31.

²⁶⁰ Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria, Written Submission, August 2007, p.2.

The Kirpan

The kirpan—a small, curved, ornamental sword—attracted some controversy in this inquiry. The kirpan is one of five articles of faith that initiated Sikh males are required to carry on their person at all times. Its purpose is solely the demonstration of faith, and the religion dictates that it is not to be used in aggression as a weapon. The kirpan is carried in a sheath, worn on a strap over the shoulder under the wearer's garments and out of sight.²⁶¹

The Committee received written submissions from the Victorian Multicultural Commission and Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria supporting the wearing of all items with religious significance in schools, including the kirpan for initiated Sikhs.²⁶² The Sikh Interfaith Council noted that only a small number of Sikhs (especially at school age) are initiated, but that once initiated, Sikhs must carry their kirpan at all times and are required to 'make atonement' if they do not.²⁶³ The Council also reported that there is no evidence to suggest that the kirpan has ever been used for any criminal purpose or to commit violence, even in the United Kingdom where there is a much larger Sikh community than in Australia.²⁶⁴

The Committee notes that most Australian states have a Control of Weapons Act or similar legislation, which provides exemptions to allow Sikhs to carry the kirpan. As noted by the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria, New South Wales has gone even further, providing a statutory defence for the wearing of the kirpan in schools.²⁶⁵ Similarly, the law on weapons in the United Kingdom was strengthened and extended to schools and, since 1996, British students have been allowed to carry the kirpan in schools.²⁶⁶

The Victorian Multicultural Commission reported that there are currently two exemptions to Victorian weapons control legislation that allow initiated Sikhs to carry the kirpan: the ceremonial dress exemption, made under the *Firearms and Other Weapons Act* 1958, which remains in force by virtue of the *Control of Weapons Act* 1990; and the 2004 general exemption allowing members of a religion whose practices involve swords to possess swords, provided they comply with requirements regarding transport, security and storage of those weapons.²⁶⁷ The Commission's written submission sought a similar exemption for initiated Sikhs in the wearing of the kirpan with a government school uniform.²⁶⁸

However, submissions supporting the wearing of the kirpan in Victorian schools sparked resistance from some quarters. Objections to the kirpan were typically based on the threat that it is seen to pose to student safety. Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, was quoted in the media as saying that it is 'not appropriate that something that can be used as a weapon is brought into a school'.²⁶⁹ His view was supported in the same article by Ms Mary Bluett, President, Australian Education Union (Victorian Branch).²⁷⁰ An online forum on the issue obtained a number of further comments from members of the public opposed to the wearing of the kirpan in schools.²⁷¹ The Committee also

²⁶¹ Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc, Supplementary Submission, July 2007, p.2.

²⁶² Victorian Multicultural Commission, Written Submission, May 2007, pp.1-2; Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

²⁶³ Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc, Supplementary Submission, July 2007, p.2.

²⁶⁴ House of Commons, *Hansard Debates*, 5 December 2006, cited in Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc, Supplementary Submission, July 2007, pp.1 & 4.

²⁶⁵ Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc, Supplementary Submission, July 2007, pp.2-3.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.2.

²⁶⁷ Victorian Multicultural Commission, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ M. Papadakis, 'Is it OK to take this to school?', *Sunday Herald Sun*, 10 June 2007, p.14.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*

²⁷¹ Readers Comments, 'OK to take to school?', 10 June 2007 – 6 July 2007, Herald Sun website, <<http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/comments/0,22023,21878958-2862,00.htm>>, accessed on 10 July 2007.

received a written submission from the Secular Party of Australia, arguing against permitting the kirpan.²⁷²

The Committee notes that some schools overseas have tried to agree a compromise between permitting the kirpan to be worn and assuaging concerns about student safety. In some Californian schools, kirpans must be blunted and riveted into a sheath to negate their potential to be used as weapons.²⁷³ In a 2006 court case involving the wearing of a kirpan in a Canadian school, the school initially proposed a requirement that the student simply ensure the kirpan was wrapped safely and remained concealed. However, this solution was subsequently deemed insufficient by the school district administrators.²⁷⁴

In a recent media interview, a spokesperson from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development suggested that the kirpan could be replaced with a small replica or pendant.²⁷⁵ Such a suggestion, however, is not supported by the Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria:

To suggest the using of a replica or any form of material is to belittle the religion. A replica or pendant is not acceptable. The kirpan cannot be of any material other than steel.²⁷⁶

The Committee therefore notes that any such compromises are likely to require significant negotiation between schools and their Sikh students and communities.

The Committee recognises the significance of the kirpan as an article of religious faith. It also acknowledges fears among some members of society that the kirpan could be dangerous if misappropriated or misused. The Committee therefore recommends that schools work with Sikh students and their communities to negotiate appropriate standards for the kirpan, as part of their general consultation around the wearing of items with religious significance. The Committee also recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate how the needs of Sikh students can best be met within the duty of care that schools owe to their students, and provide schools with further guidelines or advice if necessary.

General Issues Around Items with Religious Significance

As noted above, the prevailing view in evidence to the inquiry is that dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools should accommodate clothing and other items with religious significance. The Committee nonetheless acknowledges arguments against the wearing of clothing and other items of religious significance received in the course of the inquiry. The Secular Party of Australia put forward the view that prohibiting such attire *protects* students' rights: it advocates the rights of children to not have a religion 'imposed on them' by their parents and argued that schools must teach students to 'make rational and informed decisions about their own lives'.²⁷⁷ In another written submission, the Atheist Foundation of Australia argued that dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools should reflect the secular nature of Australian society:

...dress codes and uniforms must not include religious, commercial or political symbolism, by way of logos, jewellery or attached paraphernalia...Australia is a secular nation and its laws and regulations must be a reflection of that.²⁷⁸

The Committee notes that the Victorian Government recently asserted its commitment to secularism in public schools by passing the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, which includes the provision under section 2.2.10 that 'education

²⁷² The Secular Party of Australia, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

²⁷³ M. Hamilton 2005, *God vs. the Gavel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.116.

²⁷⁴ *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, [2006] 1 S.C.R. 256, 2006 SCC 6, p.3.

²⁷⁵ Cited in M. Papadakis, 'Is it OK to take this to school?', *Sunday Herald Sun*, 10 June 2007, p.14.

²⁷⁶ Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc, Supplementary Submission, July 2007, p.2.

²⁷⁷ The Secular Party of Australia, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

²⁷⁸ Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

in government schools must be secular and not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect'. The Committee notes that for some people, secularity is thought to include the prohibition of all demonstrations of religious affiliation in schools.

Although some may argue that the non-government sector can respond to the needs of students seeking a non-secular school environment, the Committee does not believe that non-government schools should be the only options available to students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. One student from Stockdale Road Primary School emphasised this point to the Committee in her statement on uniform exemptions:

Religious people should still get to wear their religious clothing, and religious people should be allowed to go to any government school that they or their families choose. My family goes to church and at the moment my family cannot afford a private school, and I know that I am not the only one around who is like that.²⁷⁹

The Victorian Multicultural Commission also argued in its written submission that students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds have a right to be accommodated in government schools:

It is imperative for appropriate exemption criteria and processes to be included within the findings of your Inquiry to recognise the cultural and religious rights of Victorians within government schools.²⁸⁰

The Committee supports the view that all Victorian students have the right to attend a government school, irrespective of their culture or religion. It therefore believes that prohibitions on the wearing of items with religious significance should not be used as grounds for excluding students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds from Victorian government schools.

The Committee therefore supports the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's current advice to schools, that exemptions to dress codes and school uniform policies on the grounds of religion should be permitted. The Committee recommends that this advice be supplemented by more detailed guidance and examples of best practice where appropriate. The Committee also recognises that these issues may be faced by schools across all education sectors; for example, the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria identified a need for 'clear guidance' on 'culturally important attire'.²⁸¹ The Committee therefore encourages all relevant education authorities to provide similar advice and support to schools, to help them develop policies on the wearing of clothing and other items with religious significance.

Recommendation 4.3: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require all Victorian schools to accommodate clothing and other items with religious significance where appropriate, within a framework developed by the Department.

Philosophical or Conscientious Objections

For some students and parents, a dress code or school uniform policy may conflict with genuine personal values or beliefs, and give rise to a philosophical or conscientious objection. The Committee emphasises that such objections extend far beyond a simple preference not to wear a school uniform, or a dislike for a particular school's dress code or uniform policy. The Committee also recognises that such cases are relatively rare, but that they may be particularly challenging for schools where they do arise.

²⁷⁹ Ms A. Shaw, Year 6 Student, Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.15.

²⁸⁰ Victorian Multicultural Commission, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

²⁸¹ Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

'I have never personally worn a school uniform... [My mother] decided that school uniform was not good enough for her daughter, so she did not let me wear one. She decided that it would not help my education and was morally unethical.'

Sinead Mildenhall, Year 9 Student, Footscray City College

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's policy statement on school dress codes does not currently provide schools with explicit guidance regarding philosophical objections. However, they are addressed in guidelines provided by some other education departments in Australia. The NSW Department of Education and Training's policy statement on school uniforms states that schools must respect objections to uniforms on principle, but should also initiate dialogue with parents to ascertain the real reasons behind the objection:

Principals may be faced with conscientious or 'principled' objections by individual parents to their child's wearing of a school uniform, or of individual items specified within school uniform requirements...These objections must be respected. However non-confrontational approaches should be used to engage parents in clarifying the reasons for their objection.²⁸²

The Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts also requires that in resolving matters of conflict about a school uniform, principals should consider conscientious objections, along with objections raised on any reasonable religious or cultural grounds.²⁸³ The Law Institute of Victoria's written submission suggests that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development should consider providing similar guidelines to assist Victorian schools.²⁸⁴

The Committee notes that freedom of expression is one of the rights protected by the new Victorian *Human Rights Charter*, albeit subject to 'reasonable' limitations. Mr Matthew Carroll, Manager, Human Rights Unit, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, explained that the Charter may affect the way in which 'conscientious objections' to school uniforms are treated by the law:

A simple complaint of, 'I am opposed to uniform policies. I don't wish to comply,' in the absence of a link to a protected attribute would mean that it could not come to the commission as a discrimination complaint. If a student or their parent were alleging broader issues around freedom of expression, the only avenue that we could identify at this point would be the possibility of a complaint to the Ombudsman, on the basis that the policy being auspiced by the Department of Education and enforced by the school might be in conflict with the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.²⁸⁵

As the *Human Rights Charter* only came into effect in 2007, this legal process has yet to be tested in Victoria. However, the Committee found evidence to suggest that any legal responsibilities Victorian schools may have to consider conscientious or philosophical objections to wearing a school uniform are not widely reflected in practice. The Committee's survey found that only 17.8 per cent of Victorian schools would consider requests for exemptions to their dress codes or uniform policies on philosophical grounds.²⁸⁶ However, the Committee notes that at the time of the inquiry, 2.7 per cent of schools (mostly in the government sector) had students exempted on such grounds.²⁸⁷

Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, told the Committee that philosophical disputes between parents and schools over uniform policies are currently a 'particularly difficult' process to work through.²⁸⁸ He described a 'very bruising battle' between one school and a student's father, which ended with the student being exempted from the uniform policy. Although the situation was eventually resolved, the Committee is concerned about the impact of

²⁸² Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniforms in New South Wales Government Schools*, DET, Sydney, p.10.

²⁸³ Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland), 'Responsibilities', *SMS-PR-022: Student Dress Code*, November 2007, DETA, Brisbane.

²⁸⁴ Law Institute of Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.6.

²⁸⁵ Mr M. Carroll, Manager, Human Rights Unit, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.21.

²⁸⁶ The Committee's survey found that 28.6% of schools in the government sector, 8.2% in the Catholic sector and 3.1% in the independent sector would consider exemptions from the dress code or school uniform policy on the basis of philosophical objections.

²⁸⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁸⁸ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.4.

the dispute on the student and his family's relationship with the school, and on the credibility of the school's uniform policy among other students and families.

The Committee believes that appropriate processes for negotiating conscientious objections to dress codes and school uniform policies are likely to involve balancing the rights and responsibilities of the school, and those of the student or family. Schools have a right to impose limits on individual freedom of expression, but a responsibility to ensure that the limitation is reasonable, as set out in the *Human Rights Charter*. Students and families have a right to express their beliefs and opinions, but may also be seen as having a responsibility to ensure that their claims to these rights are reasonable. For example, one school told the Committee that it 'would consider *genuine* cases' of conscientious objection to its uniform policy.²⁸⁹ The Committee notes the difficulties involved in differentiating between a genuine and unsubstantiated philosophical objection, but believes that schools should undertake to understand objections as fully as possible in order to determine an appropriate response.

In essence, the Committee recognises the rights of students and their families to pursue genuine philosophical objections to a dress code or school uniform policy. The Committee believes, however, that parents need to be cognisant of the potential negative impacts on their children's learning and social standing within the school, when pursuing exemptions from a school uniform policy based on a philosophical objection. The Committee also believes that clearer departmental guidance and more formal dispute resolution processes (as outlined in Chapter 8) may help to minimise the negative effects for parties involved in such disputes in the future.

Recommendation 4.4: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish guidelines to assist schools with appropriate responses to conscientious or philosophical objections to their dress code or school uniform policy raised by members of their school community.

Conclusion

The Committee is pleased to note that most Victorian schools recognise the importance of equality and anti-discrimination issues in their dress codes and school uniform policies. The Committee found that most schools develop policies that apply to all students in consultation with their communities, and then work with individuals and families to negotiate exemptions on a case-by-case basis where necessary. Nevertheless, the Committee has found that some difficulties have arisen around discrimination with respect to dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools, as evidenced by various complaints received by relevant education and legal authorities.

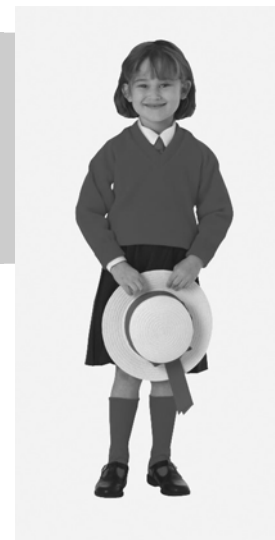
As this chapter has shown, the issue of anti-discrimination rests on a complex legal and political framework. Evidence to this inquiry has revealed some areas in which greater clarity may be desirable at a legislative and policy level. The Committee notes that disputes over discrimination with respect to dress codes and school uniforms can become serious, for students, schools and their communities. The Committee therefore believes that clearer policy and guidelines in this area from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development would go some way towards smoothing the resolution of any future issues. In addition, departmental guidelines must keep pace with changes in the relevant legislation and how it is applied. The Committee therefore also encourages the Department to monitor instances where the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*, *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* or other relevant legal instruments have been

²⁸⁹ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

applied to dress codes and school uniform policies, and disseminate further advice to schools where appropriate.

Chapter 5:

Enforcement and Sanctions



Introduction

School policies and rules are just like laws; in order for these policies to work, they must be able to be enforced.²⁹⁰

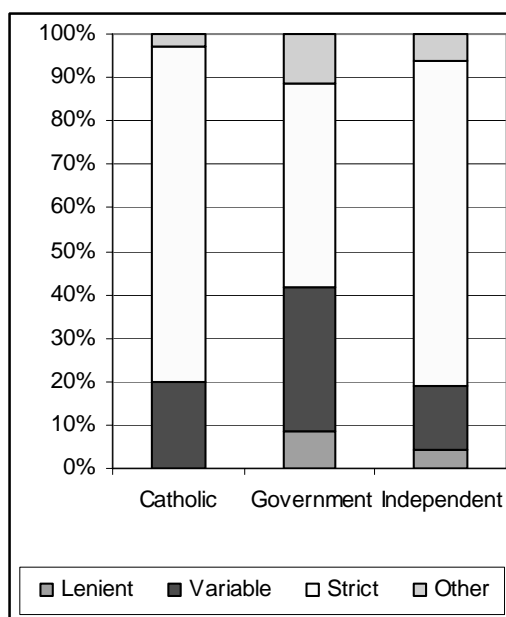
The enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools has been a contentious issue in this inquiry. Many government schools reported that they do not receive sufficient support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in enforcing their dress codes and school uniform policies, and sought stronger departmental backing. On the other hand, the Committee also heard arguments that strict enforcement is inappropriate for dress codes and school uniform policies, and that enforcement should be the subject of ongoing negotiation between schools, students and their communities. With these considerations in mind, the Committee investigated the major issues relating to the enforcement of dress codes and uniform policies in Victorian schools.

Attitudes to Enforcement

The Committee's survey asked principals to describe the enforcement of their dress code or school uniform policy as 'strict', 'variable' or 'lenient'.²⁹¹ The majority of respondents (62.3%) described the enforcement of their dress code or school uniform policy as 'strict: high standards of compliance enforced'. Enforcement was reported as variable (dependent on circumstances or teachers' discretion) in 25.1 per cent of schools, and lenient (seldom or never enforced) in 4.9 per cent. The survey data showed some differences in levels of enforcement across different sectors and year levels, as shown in Figures 5.1 and 5.2.

A much higher proportion of schools in the Catholic (77.1%) and independent (75.0%) sectors described their uniform policy as 'strictly enforced', compared with schools in the government (47.0%) sector. The vast majority of schools

Figure 5.1: Types of enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁹⁰ Ms A. Mullan, Year 12 Student, Kew High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.11.

²⁹¹ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

'[Enforcement of the uniform policy] is one of the most challenging things we have to keep on top of in terms of our day-to-day running of the school. The school's authority is constantly being questioned.'

Committee Survey

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

reporting 'lenient' or 'variable' enforcement were in the government sector, with no Catholic schools reporting 'lenient' enforcement at all. Special schools are the only ones more likely to have 'lenient' or 'variable' rather than 'strict' enforcement. While all other schools are most likely to 'strictly' enforce their dress codes and uniform policies, the proportion of 'strict enforcement' is highest at secondary level (76.6%) and lowest at primary level (57.4%).²⁹²

In the survey, 43 respondents (7.5%) opted to make an alternative comment about the enforcement of their dress code or school uniform policy, rather than select one of the options provided. Most of these comments indicated that the school uniform is optional or recommended, and therefore not enforced. Four respondents indicated that their SunSmart policy is 'strictly' enforced but that enforcement of the school uniform is otherwise 'flexible' or 'lenient'. Three expressed a 'friendly and understanding' approach to enforcement, exercising leniency when circumstances at home make compliance difficult, such as 'if the weather is miserable and washing has piled up'.²⁹³

The Committee believes that the importance of 'strictly' enforcing a dress code or school uniform policy depends on the rationale behind it. If schools choose to have a uniform in order to create a disciplined learning environment and a neat, well-presented public image, then strict enforcement may be necessary. For schools whose dress code or uniform policy is underpinned more by considerations of practicality and cost, a more relaxed approach to enforcement may be preferable.

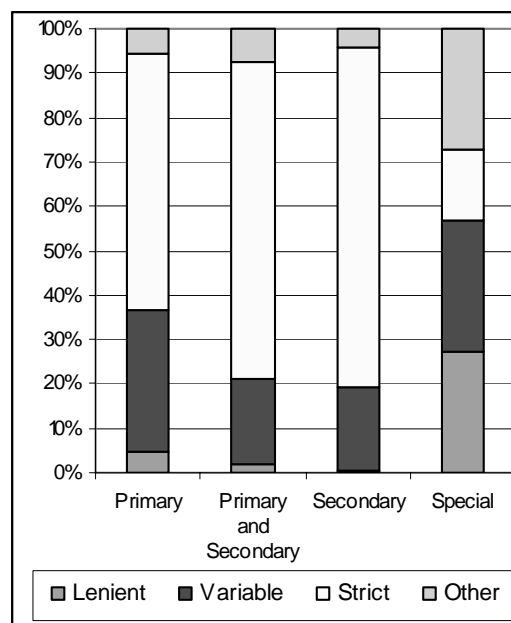
Comments in the Committee's survey indicated that schools with high numbers of students at risk of disengagement from learning are likely to prioritise student engagement and attendance over the enforcement of dress codes or school uniform policies. For example:

I have students with multiple piercings, dreadlocks and tattoos. They come to school every day without fail – even if a little hungover. A strictly enforced uniform policy would disengage these kids from school and learning. We would lose them. What matters most?²⁹⁴

Similarly, one primary school reported that challenging family circumstances sometimes present significant enough barriers to school attendance, which could be exacerbated by a strict uniform policy:

Pastoral care issues are very important, and knowledge of the family circumstance. At times a student may be in a home situation that is in crisis, and simply coming to school may be the primary objective, and the strict enforcement of 'correct' uniform may be a blocker.²⁹⁵

Figure 5.2: Types of enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools, by level (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁹² *ibid.*

²⁹³ Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁹⁴ *ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *ibid.*

Another primary school indicated that prioritising attendance does not mean that a school uniform policy is not enforced; only that non-punitive measures may be applied:

We have enough of a challenge in getting our children to school, many from Koorie families, thus emphasis on uniform is important but I would seek support for the children rather than punish [them].²⁹⁶

The Committee acknowledges the effect that the strict enforcement of a school uniform policy may have on some students' attendance and engagement, and commends the above schools in their efforts to adapt their enforcement procedures to the needs of their students.

The Committee also notes that even schools without uniforms usually place some limitations on student dress. They therefore also need to determine appropriate levels of enforcement as part of the development of their student dress code. As many of the limitations contained in a general dress code are made for reasons of health and safety, some may need to be 'strictly' enforced. Of the 16 schools in the survey indicating that they have a 'General dress code' only, three reported having 'strict' enforcement, with the majority (56.2%) reporting that enforcement is 'variable'.²⁹⁷

The Importance of Consistency

Although the Committee accepts that variance might reasonably exist between schools' attitudes to enforcement of a dress code or school uniform policy, a number of submissions noted the importance of consistent approaches to enforcement *within* schools. The Committee heard throughout the inquiry that inconsistent enforcement of a school uniform policy can cause resentment in the school community. Mr Anton Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, told the Committee that inconsistent enforcement of a school uniform policy may be particularly resented by families who struggle to meet its cost:

...a school seems to tolerate deviation from the rule for a while and then attempts a 'clean-up', much to the students' disappointment. The rush is then on for students to return to their full uniform in an attempt to avoid detention or humiliating schoolyard rubbish duty...an unwavering school uniform policy is vital in ensuring that the huge expense of secondary school uniforms is validated.²⁹⁸

One comment in the Committee's survey also noted the difficulties experienced by teachers attempting to enforce the school uniform in a school where not all teachers implement the policy consistently:

Our school has a uniform policy; however, it can only be enforced if ALL staff are on board. It is extremely difficult to be a teacher who enforces uniform wearing when others do not, and allow the students to be 'out of uniform'. Uniform is really an all or nothing issue.²⁹⁹

Students too noted the importance of consistent enforcement of a school's dress code or uniform policy:

We believe that, whether students have a good or bad track record, the punishment should remain the same... In our school we recognise that it is important to enforce the use of school uniform, but perhaps it is not as well executed as it could be... Some teachers are lenient in the discipline, and others enforce the policy brutally. Also, the student is another variable in enforcement equalisation. If the student has a good track record, the teacher may let it slide.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

²⁹⁸ Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, pp.3-4.

²⁹⁹ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁰⁰ Mr R. Nyaguy, Year 10 Student, Sandringham College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.13.

'There is something disheartening about being told off for wearing the wrong coloured socks. The colour of my socks has got nothing to do with who I am or what I am capable of.'

Ruby Franklin, Year 7 Student, Eltham High School

The Committee believes that dress codes and school uniform policies should set out clear expectations regarding how they will be enforced. It is especially important that schools expecting high standards for enforcement of the dress code or uniform policy also set out processes by which short- and long-term exemptions may be formally requested. These expectations should be developed in consultation with, and actively communicated to, students, parents, teachers and other members of the school community.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's current guidelines do not outline how an infringement of a dress code or school uniform policy should be defined, or how strict or lenient schools should be in enforcing their policies. In the Committee's view, additional advice may be desirable, to ensure that school leaders recognise the need to clearly articulate expected standards for compliance and enforcement.

Recommendation 5.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to establish, in consultation with their communities, clear expectations regarding compliance with their dress codes and school uniform policies, to ensure that a consistent approach to enforcement is applied throughout the school.

Impact on the School Environment

A common complaint heard by the Committee was that the enforcement of a school uniform policy can be time-consuming for teachers. A comment from Mr Brian Burgess, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, suggests that this is especially true for trivial, everyday infractions:

...the policing of school uniforms is a very time-consuming process for schools, mostly at the low level, 'I've left it in the wash,' or, 'The dog ate it,' or something along those lines.³⁰¹

The Committee found that in some schools, teachers are asked to enforce uniform policies to a minute level of detail. For example:

Recently our school has started to crack down on socks...They have been going through mainly the younger year levels and getting them to take off their shoes to make sure they do not have colours, stripes or symbols on their socks, even below the shoe lines, and even those who wear pants.³⁰²

One parent also lamented the impact on teacher professionalism in a school where enforcement of the uniform has been made a high priority:

The staff at our school have become uniform police rather than educators. What a waste of their skills!³⁰³

Indeed, submissions from schools without a uniform, including Spensley Street Primary School and Eltham High School, noted that one of the benefits of not having a school uniform is that it enables teachers and principals to focus on more important matters.³⁰⁴ A teacher from Princes Hill Secondary College made a similar comment:

...after working in schools with uniforms I am very grateful to be in a school where the large investment in time and energy required to enforce uniform policy is not needed. We can spend our time teaching rather than policing.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.2.

³⁰² Mr N. Dubbeld, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.16.

³⁰³ Ms K. Clarke & Mr L. Challis, Parents, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³⁰⁴ Spensley Street Primary School Parent Association, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

³⁰⁵ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.7.

The Committee supports the view that the enforcement of a dress code or school uniform policy should not be expected to constitute a significant element of a teacher's workload.

On the other hand, some submissions claimed that school uniforms improve general student behaviour, thereby reducing the need for teachers to spend time on other disciplinary issues.³⁰⁶ Both primary and secondary students also made comments to this effect:

When students have school uniform on, they are ready to work and are not silly because they are representing the school. When they do not wear uniform, they go silly and think they do not have to do anything; they think it is a free day where they can do anything they want.³⁰⁷

It sets boundaries between school, home, work and leisure. Once a student puts on a school uniform, they are in school mode; once they take the school uniform off, they are in home or leisure mode. It helps to keep students in an appropriate frame of mind during the school day.³⁰⁸

In the United States, school discipline has been associated with compulsory school uniforms. When the Long Beach Unified School District, California, became the first US district to introduce compulsory school uniforms in 1994, dramatic improvements were reported in student behaviour.³⁰⁹ After visiting the district, the then US president Bill Clinton endorsed compulsory uniforms in a 1996 address to the nation:

We have a basic, old-fashioned bottom line. We must get violence out of our schools, and we must put discipline and learning back in our schools. If it means teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms. If it means that the schoolrooms will be more orderly, more disciplined, and that our young people will learn to evaluate themselves by what they are on the inside instead of what they're wearing on the outside, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms.³¹⁰

It should be noted, however, that the introduction of the compulsory school uniform policy in Long Beach was simultaneously backed by a renewed commitment to the enforcement of student discipline. Academics David Brunnsma and Kerry Rockquemore have therefore dismissed the causal relationship between school uniforms and behaviour claimed by the Long Beach District, suggesting instead that the accompanying emphasis on discipline was responsible for the improvement.³¹¹

Students from schools without uniforms assured the Committee that students in uniform are not necessarily better behaved. This comment from a student at Princes Hill Secondary College suggests that the association between school uniforms and student discipline is fallacious:

Schools with a strict dress code and uniform give the impression that they have a strong disciplinary system, but all schools put as much energy into applying a strong code of conduct, and lack of uniform does not mean that student conduct is any worse than in a uniformed school.³¹²

³⁰⁶ For example, Mr P. Moore, Teacher, Written Submission, March 2007, p.1; Carrum Downs Primary School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³⁰⁷ Ms A. Beattie, Year 6 Student, Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.9.

³⁰⁸ Mr L. Deegan, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.13.

³⁰⁹ R. Schachter 2005, 'Do clothes make the student?', *District Administration*, May 2005, p.46.

³¹⁰ W. Clinton, then President, United States 1996, *The President's Radio Address*, The American Presidency Project website, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=52449>>, accessed on 2 October 2007.

³¹¹ D.L. Brunnsma & K.A. Rockquemore 1998, 'Effects of Student Uniforms on Attendance, Behavior Problems, Substance Abuse, and Academic Achievement', *The Journal of Educational Research*, September – October 1998, p.51.

³¹² Ms M. Halloran-Mackay, Year 7 Student, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.5.

'Our school juggles continually the strong push from some middle class parents that our uniform ought to look like a private school uniform, balanced with a sense that it's contradictory to our school philosophy to be having endless punitive discussions about something as peripheral to real learning as how a student dresses.'

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Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

The Committee acknowledges that Victorian schools with and without uniforms generally maintain high standards for student behaviour, and this has certainly been the Committee's observation in its dealings with schools during current and previous inquiries.

As well as the impact on teaching time, some schools noted the effect of enforcing a school uniform policy on relationships between teachers and students. This came through strongly in a written submission from Sandringham College, which does not require students at its senior campus to wear a school uniform:

The environment the College provides and continues to develop also stresses the building and maintaining of positive, more adult learning relationships between teachers and students. Taking away the discipline aspects of uniform enforcement assists with this.³¹³

An anecdote from Ms Jacinta Cashen, President, Victorian Council of School Organisations, describing one principal's transition from a school with a uniform to one without, also supported this view:

...he was wondering why he felt so good and happy...He realised it was because at this school he did not have to spend his time in the morning asking students to put their jackets on properly or point out that they were not wearing the right shoes. Instead he was able to engage in a conversation about who they were and what they were up to and how they were going. He really noticed the significant community difference between a school that had a uniform and one that did not.³¹⁴

Written submissions from Princes Hill Secondary College and Eltham High School also suggested that not having a school uniform contributes to improved teacher-student relationships.³¹⁵

Nevertheless, the Committee also heard suggestions that protection of teacher-student relationships should not inhibit the enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies. Ms Ashleigh Mullan, Year 12 Student, Kew High School, told the Committee that the enforcement of a school uniform policy is an entirely appropriate element of the professional relationship between teachers and their students:

At the end of the day, a teacher-student relationship involves teaching and learning. It is a professional relationship. They are not there to be your best friend, and therefore should not have to think twice when enforcing a uniform policy.³¹⁶

Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, took this argument further, suggesting that interactions over the enforcement of dress codes or uniform policies could even provide an opportunity to initiate more meaningful contact with students:

...a subtle benefit for some was that the uniform or lack of it was an excuse for a principal or an assistant principal to begin a conversation with a student, which often leads on to other matters that are impacting on the student and their schooling.³¹⁷

Mr Lochlin Deegan, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, also dismissed the claims that the enforcement of a school uniform policy will damage teacher-student relationships, suggesting that the effect of enforcement on relationships 'will come down to a particular student's behaviour and mindset'.³¹⁸ The Committee concurs that the attitudes of both teachers and students will be the most critical

³¹³ Sandringham College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³¹⁴ Ms J. Cashen, President, Victorian Council of School Organisations, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.24.

³¹⁵ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.8; Eltham High School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

³¹⁶ Ms A. Mullan, Year 12 Student, Kew High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.12.

³¹⁷ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.2.

³¹⁸ Mr L. Deegan, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.13.

factors in determining the effect of the enforcement of a dress code or school uniform policy on teacher-student relationships.

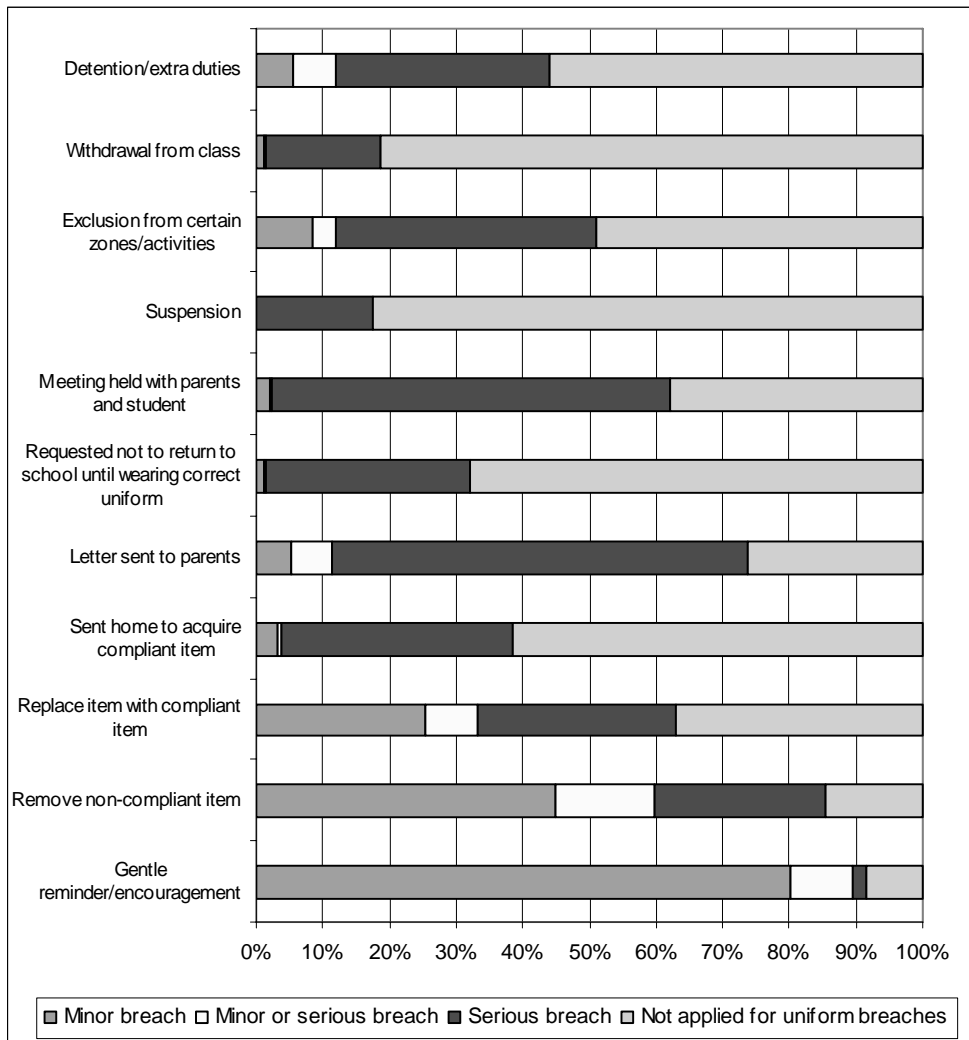
Appropriate Sanctions

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advises schools that sanctions applied to breaches of dress codes and school uniform policies should reflect the statewide policy on student discipline:

The disciplinary measures used to enforce a school council dress code must be consistent with the school's student code of conduct and with the statewide *Student Discipline Procedures* 1994. The disciplinary measures used should reflect the graded series of sanctions contained in discipline procedures, the gravity and repetition of breaches, and considerations of the age and personal circumstances of students.³¹⁹

Sanctions applied for breaches of a dress code or uniform policy typically have one or both of the following objectives: to punish the student for non-compliance with a school rule, or to remedy the breach by getting the student into correct uniform. The Committee's survey investigated how a range of such sanctions are currently applied in Victorian schools (refer Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3: Types of sanctions applied to minor and serious breaches of dress codes and uniform policies in Victorian schools (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³¹⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

'...part of being a young person in the community is testing social norms and boundaries and schools and communities should demonstrate a degree of tolerance of this behaviour.'

Kera Burnham, Victorian Student Representative Council

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Gentle reminders or encouragement are the sanctions most often used for minor breaches of a dress code or school uniform policy, applied in such cases by 89.5 per cent of schools. The next most common sanction for minor breaches is the removal of the non-compliant item (59.6%), sometimes accompanied by replacement with a compliant item supplied by the school. For serious breaches of a dress code or uniform policy, a letter to parents is the sanction most commonly applied (68.4%), followed by a meeting with parents and the student (60.2%). Suspension is the sanction applied by the smallest proportion of schools for breaches of the dress code or school uniform policy, and is only applied in cases of a serious breach.³²⁰

Primary and secondary schools are almost equally likely to use a gentle reminder or encouragement for a minor breach of their dress code or uniform policy, but primary schools are more likely to apply such measures to serious breaches as well. Stricter sanctions, including suspension, withdrawal from class and detention, are all applied much more frequently in secondary schools.³²¹

The Committee discussed with students the types of sanctions they believe should be applied for breaches of school uniform policies and whether such sanctions should be the same as for breaches of other school rules. Views on both sides of the debate were heard from primary students. Ms Amanda Beattie, Year 6 Student, Stockdale Road Primary School, presented the view that all breaches of school rules are a student's choice, and should therefore all be treated similarly:

We think that students who misbehave [with respect to uniform] should be treated the same as others who break school rules, because misbehaving can be caused by a number of things, but generally it is all about choices. We also believe there should be similar punishments for breaking uniform rules as there are for our normal school rules. They are the school rules and every student must obey them.³²²

Ms Georgia Boyle, Year 6 Student, Essendon Primary School, took an opposing view, arguing that infractions against a school uniform policy should be treated differently from other types of misbehaviour:

The punishment should vary. It should not be compared to someone who has physically hurt another student.³²³

Secondary students agreed that the more serious sanctions that may be applied for breaches of other school rules should not be applied to breaches of a dress code or school uniform policy. For example:

Enforcement of the uniform policy should not involve measures that would adversely affect a student's learning, such as withdrawal from class, suspension or expulsion. These measures would better suit a more serious breach of rules, such as bullying. Enforcement procedures that are deemed inappropriate will not be accepted. They will cause resistance, and therefore the uniform policy will not be followed. Disciplinary measures that would be deemed appropriate are things such as verbal reminders to students, detention or communication with parents.³²⁴

The prevailing view in departmental policies throughout Australia is that positive reinforcement is a more appropriate means of enforcing dress codes and school uniform policies than punitive measures. This view was also articulated by Mr Fred Ackerman, President, Victorian Principals Association in a recent media article:

³²⁰ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³²¹ *ibid.*

³²² Ms A. Beattie, Year 6 Student, Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.8.

³²³ Ms G. Boyle, Year 6 Student, Essendon Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.7.

³²⁴ Ms A. Mullan, Year 12 Student, Kew High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.12.

If people are coming to this issue from the point of view of punishment...they're on the wrong tram...You won't get blind adherence to wearing a uniform by using draconian practices.³²⁵

The following comment from Mr John Gow, Principal, Mont Albert School, suggests that positive reinforcement may be especially effective for younger students:

In primary schools most children like to conform and the wearing of the uniform helps them to feel accepted and that they belong. I realise that in secondary schools this may not be the case and that sanctions may be necessary.³²⁶

The following comment from Ms Amber Harry, Year 6 Student, Belvedere Park Primary School, supports the idea that primary students prefer to comply with uniform policies:

When our school has an assembly, the principal and teachers give praise to the students for wearing their school uniforms and tell them how good they look...If you recognise or reward the students who do wear school uniform, the students who do not wear the uniform will get upset and will want to wear the uniform so they can also be recognised.³²⁷

The Committee's survey received a comment from a special school, which also enforces its uniform policy through 'positive reinforcement and house points' for its students.³²⁸

The Committee heard suggestions that secondary students may be more likely to deliberately rebel against rules for student dress and appearance.³²⁹ Therefore, compliance with dress codes and school uniform policies among older students may be best encouraged through negotiated approaches to sanctions. The Victorian Student Representative Council, which represents secondary students from across Victoria, emphasised that students should be involved in determining systems and sanctions for the enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies, and even in their implementation:

In some cases, punishments imposed by a representative panel of students are more effective than those imposed by teachers or principals. However, this process would need to be carefully managed and completely transparent to avoid placing undue pressure on students involved.³³⁰

The kinds of systems favoured by the Student Representative Council would be flexible enough to reflect the nature and circumstances of individual offences, and tiered so that harsher sanctions would only be applied after 'giving students the chance to make good'.³³¹ The Committee encourages schools to involve students in decision-making about the enforcement of their dress codes and school uniform policies.

The Committee also notes that breaches of dress codes and school uniform policies may not always be the fault of the student. Parents and carers may be responsible, either deliberately or inadvertently, for a student not wearing the full, correct uniform. The Committee was advised of a number of such cases where

³²⁵ Mr F. Ackerman, President, Victorian Principals Association, cited in C. Milburn, 'Call for a tough stand on uniforms', *The Age*, 7 May 2007.

³²⁶ Mont Albert School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

³²⁷ Ms A. Harry, Year 6 Student, Belvedere Park Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council, 6 September 2007, p.9.

³²⁸ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³²⁹ For example, Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.29; Ms E. Bromham, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Mr J. Goodman, Assistant Principal, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.3; Mr S. Smith, Year 11 Student, Yea High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.20; Ms L. Forrest, Year 11 Student, University High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.9.

³³⁰ Mr D. Flakemore, Student Representative, Victorian Student Representative Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.17.

³³¹ *ibid.*

students were penalised by the school due to the differing views of their parents and staff at the school. For example:

When the school first contacted us about this, we explained to them that ... I will get him another pair but not yet. Firstly, I cannot afford to continually go out and buy shoes and secondly he was nearly out of them and it was close to the end of term... They stuck him in time out which I later found out was for a week. Sitting in a room all day doing nothing just because of his shoes. If I kept him home for a week and sat him in his room doing nothing because I did not have black polishable shoes, what would have been said and done then.³³²

While a number of secondary schools remarked that schools should punish students for breaches of uniform policy even when they are caused or supported by their parents,³³³ several others noted that such sanctions would not be effective in securing compliance.³³⁴ The Committee believes that mediation and support are preferable in these circumstances.

The Committee notes that meetings or other communication with parents is currently the most common response to serious breaches of dress codes or uniform policies in Victorian schools.³³⁵ The Committee believes that by adopting a supportive and conciliatory approach to such communication, schools can readily resolve most disputes relating to dress codes and school uniform policies. It is essential that during such discussions, schools seek to uncover the underlying reasons for non-compliance, and work with students and their families to find a mutually acceptable solution. The Committee notes that if such issues cannot be resolved at a local level, mediation services may be available, as discussed in Chapter 8.

Exclusion and Suspension

The Committee found that the most contentious of possible sanctions for breaches of dress codes or school uniform policies is the exclusion of students from learning opportunities. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advises schools to take care that students' studies are not adversely affected by the enforcement of a dress code or school uniform policy. Sanctions involving exclusion from school activities will therefore not normally be appropriate:

Any infringement of a dress code is not usually linked with interference to the rights of other students or the capacity of a teacher to teach a class, and therefore withdrawal from classroom instruction (or other school activities) will not normally apply. Exception to this would include issues of safety or issues relating to students representing the school in the community for optional educational activities.³³⁶

The Committee found that a similar stance on exclusion is taken by all jurisdictions in Australia that have policy statements on dress codes and school uniform policies, as well as by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria.³³⁷ The Committee notes that in Queensland, legislation limits the sanctions that may be applied to breaches of dress codes or school uniform policies to: after school or lunchtime detention; exclusion from activities in which the student is representing the school; or exclusion from any activity that is not an essential school educational program.³³⁸

³³² Ms T. Marshall & Mr D. Marshall, Parents, Written Submission, July 2007, p.1.

³³³ For example, Eumemmerring College Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Whittlesea Secondary College, Written Submission, July 2007, p.2.

³³⁴ Ms J. Covington, Written Submission, May 2007, p.8; Pakenham Hills Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Hawkesdale P-12 College School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

³³⁵ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³³⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

³³⁷ Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

³³⁸ Section 362, *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* (Queensland).

The Committee heard a range of additional views against the exclusion of students for breaches of dress codes and school uniform policies. A number of written submissions from parents argued against exclusion,³³⁹ as did several students at public hearings.³⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that students often take a broad view of what they consider to be essential educational activities. For example, when debating the Committee's mock '*School Uniform Bill 2007*', students from Warragul Regional College suggested that withdrawal of privileges (including exclusion from extracurricular activities and excursions) should be considered an appropriate disciplinary measure for the enforcement of dress codes and school uniforms.³⁴¹ Other students spoke against Warragul Regional College's proposed amendment to the 'Bill':

I personally believe excursions are very important learning paths that allow students to embrace another way of learning, such as going to a French cafe, to say, 'Parlez vous Français?' or something like that. It is a very important part of learning to realise that you can learn out of the classroom situation.³⁴²

If it is to do with an excursion to do with a certain subject, a certain class, getting taken away from that because of something you are not wearing could affect your learning. Therefore I do not really agree with this either.³⁴³

One of the strongest opponents of exclusion practices was Dr Mark Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc:

...core learning is really important for all kids and exclusion practices because of the wrong colour pants or the wrong jumper is totally inappropriate.³⁴⁴

The Law Institute of Victoria strongly argued against enforcing a dress code or school uniform policy through student suspension or expulsion:

The Law Institute of Victoria submits that a student should *never* be suspended or expelled from school, on the basis of a breach of school uniform policy.³⁴⁵

In the Institute's view, a dress code or school uniform policy enforced by suspension or expulsion would not constitute a 'reasonable limit' under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995* or the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.³⁴⁶ However, Dr Helen Szoke, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, suggested that the appropriateness of suspension depends on its intended outcome:

Suspension on the grounds of uniform would depend on what the suspension is trying to achieve in relation to the interests of the individual and the interests of the school community.³⁴⁷

In considering the impacts of suspension or other forms of exclusion, the Committee notes that many students who breach school uniform policies are already more likely to be at risk of exclusion and disengagement from schooling than those who comply with such policies. The following comment from the Parents

³³⁹ For example, Ms L. McCurdy, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007, p.4; Port Melbourne Primary School Parents and Friends Association, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2; Ms K. Rolands, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

³⁴⁰ For example, Mr R. Nyaguy, Year 10 Student, Sandringham College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.13; Mr A. Dowsett, Year 12 Student, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.18.

³⁴¹ Ms M. Young, Year 10 Student, Warragul Regional College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.14.

³⁴² Ms L. Forrest, Year 11 Student, University High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.14.

³⁴³ Ms J. Longmuir, Year 9 Student, Kyneton Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.14.

³⁴⁴ Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.26.

³⁴⁵ Law Institute of Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.5.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*

³⁴⁷ Dr H. Szoke, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.21.

'I do not understand why enforcement needs to be such an issue for people. I have heard people say that the department does not back up schools when they say they are having trouble enforcing a school uniform. I think those people need to go back and talk to their students.'

Jacinta Cashen,
President, Victorian
Council of School
Organisations

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Victoria online forum suggests that punishing these students through exclusion may only distance them further from schooling:

As for punishing students who are constantly out of uniform, for whatever reason, I don't see this as appropriate. Especially if the student is not wearing uniform as a type of protest toward the school. In these cases, most students are likely to be disengaged with the school anyway, and any measures against them, serious or otherwise, will only increase their feelings of ill-will.³⁴⁸

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc made similar comments in its written submission:

VAEAI strongly believes that schools must therefore take into account a wide range of considerations when developing measures for non-compliance with dress codes and must recognise that for some students, it is an achievement for them to be attending school. Schools should use positive incentives to encourage students to comply with school uniform policies. This means refraining from, as much as possible, punishing students for failing to wear uniforms as it can be counterproductive to raising their academic performance...The Education Department should advise schools not to suspend students for non-compliance with uniform policies. Any disciplinary actions taken against students should be determined on a case by case basis...³⁴⁹

Dr Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc expanded this argument in a public hearing, noting that there are better alternatives to exclusion for students already at risk of disengagement:

There can be alternatives. Again, you have got to look at the cause. Is it a defiance of the rule? In that case a sanction is necessary, without any question, but a sanction can be community service within a school, it can be personal learning, developing, writing a paper — if it is defiance. If it is because of economic needs, no sanction is warranted. It is tough. They both look the same, but that is where the principal needs to know the kid. If it is rebellion — I know that can be a bit healthy, too — a sanction which is in-house and of value to the school community is far more smarter and strategic than, say, one that takes a kid out of learning. No-one wins then.³⁵⁰

Nonetheless, the Committee heard a significant number of concerns from schools, stating that they need greater powers to enforce their dress codes and school uniform policies. These concerns appeared throughout all forms of evidence to the inquiry, including written submissions, survey comments and public hearings. Mr Jim Alsop, a government secondary school principal, explained that these powers should include the power to exclude students, in all circumstances except where non-compliance is related to cost:

School Councils need full powers to exclude students who do not comply (notwithstanding reasonable pricing and compassion for financial considerations).³⁵¹

Often, such comments and concerns were accompanied by requests that enforcement of school uniform policies receive stronger support from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, indicated that departmental support for enforcement is one of the biggest issues currently facing government secondary schools with respect to dress codes and school uniform policies.³⁵²

Schools provided a variety of reasons for believing that stronger departmental backing for the enforcement of school uniform policies is important. One school suggested that insufficient departmental support is damaging the reputation of the government school sector:

³⁴⁸ Ms S. Healy, 'Should school uniforms be compulsory?', *Parents Victoria online forum*, 10 September 2007, Parents Victoria website, <<http://www.cybertext.net.au/pv/discussion.htm>>.

³⁴⁹ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Written Submission, May 2007, p.6.

³⁵⁰ Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.27.

³⁵¹ Mr Jim Alsop, School Principal, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³⁵² Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.9.

Schools need more support from the Department of Education and Training to enforce uniform. Schools are judged by the community on uniform standards, and a lack of government support for uniforms helps undermine state schools.³⁵³

Charlton College School Council believes that the limitations on the powers of schools in enforcing their uniform policies prevent school staff from fulfilling their responsibilities:

Our council believes that we should be given greater powers to enforce the uniform policy. At the moment our Principal and staff have the responsibility to enforce the policy, but in reality have very few powers if parents and students wish to disregard the uniform policy of the school.³⁵⁴

Eumemmerring College Council also argued that strong enforcement of a dress code or uniform policy supports compliance with other school rules:

Strong enforcement of the uniform code is necessary to establish an environment where students accept the need to conform to school rules...Schools need a clear mandate to enforce a dress code.³⁵⁵

The Committee notes the frequency with which these and similar comments appeared in evidence to the inquiry and the level of frustration apparent within them.

The Committee found that in practice, Victorian students are regularly being excluded from school activities for breaches of dress codes and uniform policies.³⁵⁶ Survey results show that 26.4 per cent of Victorian government secondary schools are prepared to suspend students for serious breaches of their dress codes or school uniform policies.³⁵⁷ Students may be suspended for serious infractions of dress codes and school uniform policies in an even greater proportion of secondary schools in the Catholic (46.2%) and independent (34.4%) sectors.³⁵⁸

The survey findings are borne out by evidence in written submissions to the inquiry. A 2005 government school newsletter contains a message from the principal stating that students may be suspended for breaches of the school's uniform policy:

Any students wearing different coloured t-shirts next term may be suspended from school as the wearing of the wrong colour will be seen as an act of defiance.³⁵⁹

Written submissions from other government schools also state that students can be suspended for breaches of the dress code or uniform policy, if such breaches are sufficiently serious.³⁶⁰

Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals provided an explanation for the apparent discrepancy between government policy and current practice in schools. Mr Burgess reported that as such, suspensions for breaches of school uniform policy do occur, but typically 'on the grounds of non-compliance with an instruction from the principal'.³⁶¹ Departmental guidelines allow for a student to be suspended if he or she 'fails to comply with any reasonable and

³⁵³ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁵⁴ Charlton College School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³⁵⁵ Eumemmerring College Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

³⁵⁶ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁵⁷ Includes secondary and primary/secondary schools.

³⁵⁸ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁵⁹ Whittlesea Secondary College Newsletter, 22 June 2005. Copy supplied by Ms B. Johns, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.17.

³⁶⁰ For example Lyndhurst Secondary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2; Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.4.

³⁶¹ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.5.

'At the moment, really, the government policy is that students should not be disallowed educational opportunities on the basis of not wearing a uniform...In a private school, if you do not wear a uniform you are not in the school, so why should we be treated any differently?'

Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals

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clearly communicated instruction of a principal or teacher'.³⁶² Such practices are typically reflected in school uniform policies as follows:

Where the College feels ongoing, unwarranted uniform non-compliance has become of a defiant nature, regular disciplinary measures may be invoked (including detention, time out, suspension, withdrawal of privileges, non-attendance at school and interschool activities).³⁶³

The Committee's survey also found that in Victorian schools, sending a student home to change into the correct uniform is a more commonly applied sanction than formal exclusion measures, such as withdrawal from class or suspension.³⁶⁴ Results showed that 74.9 per cent of secondary schools (including 69.6% of government secondary schools), 55.5 per cent of primary/secondary schools and 10.1 per cent of primary schools would send students home to change, most often in the case of a serious breach of the dress code or school uniform policy. Written submissions from schools similarly noted that students may be sent home to change into the correct uniform.³⁶⁵ In addition, 32.8 per cent of Victorian schools indicated that they would request a student not to return to school until they are in correct uniform.³⁶⁶ The Committee found many examples of such practices within various school uniform policies across all three sectors. For example:

Ongoing non-compliance (without written and satisfactory explanation from parents/guardians) will be met with a letter sent home requesting an immediate rectification of the problem... Further non-compliance will be met with a letter sent home requesting non-attendance until a conference takes place (Year Level Manager, parent, student).³⁶⁷

The fourth time (in one term) a student is out of uniform without a note, the Deputy Principal – Students will immediately contact parents and they will come and collect the student from school. The student will stay at home until the uniform is worn correctly.³⁶⁸

Again, this type of sanction is far more common in the secondary sector, with 61.1 per cent of secondary schools and 42.0 per cent of primary/secondary schools indicating they would request a student not to return to school until they are in correct uniform. This compares with only 5.7 per cent of primary schools.³⁶⁹

It appears to the Committee that schools are currently enforcing dress codes and school uniform policies in a climate of some uncertainty. While many schools apply the full range of sanctions to breaches of their school uniform policies that would be applied to breaches of other school rules, it appears that many others feel unable to do so because of a perceived lack of departmental support. The Committee believes that clearer guidance on the issue will ensure that schools have accurate expectations for departmental support, as well as assist schools in considering the issues and implications around the various sanctions that they may choose to apply.

³⁶² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student discipline procedures', section 4.7, (updated April 2005), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

³⁶³ Portland Secondary College, *School Uniform Policy*, Portland Secondary College website, <http://www.portlandsc.vic.edu.au/about/info_for_parents.html#uniform>, accessed on 14 November 2007.

³⁶⁴ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁶⁵ For example, Lyndhurst Secondary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2; Mooroolbark College Written Submission, September 2007, p.1.

³⁶⁶ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁶⁷ Portland Secondary College, *School Uniform Policy*, Portland Secondary College website, <http://www.portlandsc.vic.edu.au/about/info_for_parents.html#uniform>, accessed on 14 November 2007.

³⁶⁸ Catholic College Wodonga, *Code of Conduct*, Catholic College Wodonga website, <<http://www.ccw.vic.edu.au/ccwprofile/policies/Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf>>, accessed on 14 November 2007.

³⁶⁹ Comparable figures for the government sector are: secondary schools, 47.0%; primary and secondary schools, 24.0%; and primary schools, 6.0%. Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

The Committee further notes that during consultation for its recent revisions to its guidelines on school uniform related policies, the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families received similar complaints to those received by this inquiry. Some contributors called for greater departmental support for schools in enforcing their dress codes and uniform policies, as well stronger guidance on the issue of exclusion.³⁷⁰ The Department therefore revised its guidelines to permit exclusion for breaches of school uniform policies, in certain cases:

A head teacher can discipline a pupil for breach of uniform/appearance policy. However, DCSF does not consider exclusion to be an appropriate response to breaches of school uniform/appearance policy, **except** where they are persistent and defiant. Where a pupil repeatedly refuses to comply with school uniform policy even if they do not otherwise display poor behaviour, we believe that exclusion could be an appropriate response, depending on the circumstances of the case.³⁷¹

The revised UK guidelines also provide detailed advice on sending students home to change non-compliant clothing. This includes information on an appropriate period of absence, considerations of parental availability, and the difference between an authorised absence from school and a formal exclusion.³⁷²

While the Committee believes that exclusion from learning opportunities should always be seen as a last resort, the Committee generally supports the position outlined in the recently revised UK guidance to schools on school uniform and related policies. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development consider similar revisions to its guidelines for the enforcement of dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools. Such revisions should clarify the sanctions from which schools may choose in enforcing their dress codes and school uniform policies, and the circumstances in which they may be applied. In doing so, the Department should give consideration to all forms of enforcement, including those that involve the exclusion of students from schooling.

Recommendation 5.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish detailed guidelines regarding acceptable sanctions for infringements of dress codes or school uniform policies. This should involve discussion of specific sanctions, including various forms of exclusion, and the circumstances in which they may be applied.

Conclusion

The Committee found that a number of matters relating to the enforcement of a dress code or school uniform policy need to be determined through consultation between schools and their communities. Most importantly, schools and communities must establish shared standards for the enforcement of the code or uniform policy, to ensure that expectations regarding compliance are as consistent as possible across all parties involved. In most schools, these expectations will be supported by a system of appropriate sanctions, which should also reflect the standards of the school community, including the students.

The Committee also believes that it is important for expectations relating to the enforcement of dress codes or school uniform policies to be made clear at a systemic level. The Committee found that there is currently a discrepancy between expectations among schools and the perceived level of support provided to them by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. In the Committee's view, clearer departmental guidelines, as suggested in recommendations throughout this report, will greatly assist schools in developing

³⁷⁰ Department for Children, Schools and Families (United Kingdom) 2007, *Guidance to Schools on School Uniform Related Policies – Consultation Response and Summary Report*, DCSF, London.

³⁷¹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (United Kingdom) 2007, *DCSF Guidance to Schools on School Uniform and Related Policies*, DCSF, London.

³⁷² *ibid.*

dress codes and school uniform policies that meet both systemic and community expectations, and which can therefore receive full departmental backing.

Chapter 6:

Costs



Introduction

If the wearing of school uniform is to be compulsory they need to be affordable and easily accessible for all.³⁷³

Today's education environment is often described as competitive, with schools competing for enrolments and associated funding. The Committee is aware that the external image of the school has become a significant factor in this competition, and that student appearance is often an important aspect of how a school presents itself to the community. The Committee heard that some schools feel under pressure to adopt more 'traditional' and expensive school uniform items, to put them on equal footing with their more 'prestigious' competitors. Others face pressure to reduce school uniform costs to a level that will be attractive to parents from their target communities. With these considerations in mind, the Committee investigated the issues faced by schools in ensuring that the costs of complying with their dress codes or school uniform policies are appropriate to their students and communities.

Are School Uniforms the Cheapest Option?

The Committee found that a key argument around the advantages and disadvantages of dress codes and school uniforms is whether or not it is more cost-effective to have a school uniform. Schools with a uniform typically argue that it eases financial pressure on parents, by removing the need to buy expensive fashion clothing for their children for everyday wear. Ms Indira Narain, Year 6 Student, Surfside Primary School, told the Committee that students with uniforms require fewer clothes, as they do not have to worry about variety for the sake of fashion:

I think it is cheaper to wear school uniform because you only have to buy about two of them, but you have to buy heaps of casual clothes and students worry about different trends.³⁷⁴

In his recent publication on school uniforms in US schools, Dr David Brunnsma, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Missouri, explained the importance that today's students attach to clothing:

The pressure placed on students by their peers to wear expensive clothing has escalated dramatically. Clothes have become the pre-eminent status symbol. To some students, expensive and designer clothing is more important than good grades, success in athletics, or other extracurricular activities.³⁷⁵

As noted in previous chapters, the Committee recognises that growing fashion consciousness among young people is placing significant pressure on parents to spend more on clothing for their children. It was argued throughout this inquiry that school uniforms are one means by which this pressure may be alleviated.

School uniform garments were also often described as better quality than fashion garments of comparable cost, and better suited to the wear and tear placed on

³⁷³ The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division, Written Submission, April 2007, p.1.

³⁷⁴ Ms I. Narain, Year 6 Student, Surfside Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.19.

³⁷⁵ D.L. Brunnsma (ed) c2006, *Evaluating Public School Uniforms: A Decade of Research and Debate*, Rowman & Littlefield Education, Lanham, MD, p.52.

'The real designer clothes now, like pairs of jeans that you see in the paper, can be over \$200. So over five days you need five days worth of brand-new fashionable clothes in order to fit in, whereas with a uniform you only need to buy one and it can last you a whole year.'

Dean Williams, Year 9 Student, Melbourne High School

them by school activities. A number of submissions also noted that although the initial costs of a school uniform may be high, they may be offset over time by the uniform's durability.³⁷⁶ Several contributors to the inquiry contended that the cost-effectiveness of school uniforms makes them especially beneficial to students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. Mrs Evelyn Sayers, Board Member, Association of Independent Schools in Victoria, described this as the prevailing view in her school community:

My school is in the city of Casey, so we are a low socioeconomic group out there, and my parents are the ones, about 97 per cent who say, 'We are pleased that you have got a school uniform'. They believe in the end that it is cheaper for them than providing the casual clothes that students would otherwise wear.³⁷⁷

The Committee's survey found that schools with less affluent communities are less likely to have full compulsory uniforms than schools with more affluent communities.³⁷⁸ However, they are also by far the most likely to have optional school uniforms, suggesting that such schools prefer to leave it to individual families to decide which is the most cost-effective option for them.

On the other hand, submissions from schools without uniforms also claimed that their approach is the most cost-effective.³⁷⁹ A common argument was that casual clothing must be purchased for weekend and holiday wear anyway, and that wearing this to school as well maximises its use, especially for young children who often outgrow garments before they are worn out.³⁸⁰ Another point frequently made by schools without uniforms was that choice of clothing lessens students' interest in expensive brands and competitive dressing.³⁸¹ Mr Dylan Leach, Year 12 Student, Princes Hill Secondary College, explained that the perception that students without uniforms are preoccupied with fashions is incorrect:

...they all have this impression that it is a one-stop fashion contest when it is absolutely not the case, because we are just so used to seeing everyone in casual clothes that we do not make the observation; we do not rank them by the clothing that they wear.³⁸²

Submissions from parents in the Princes Hill Secondary College community noted that the opportunity for students to experiment with different clothing and overcome marketing pressure is something they especially value about the uniform-free culture in the school.³⁸³ Assistant Principal John Goodman further noted that the student culture at Princes Hill has developed its own distinctive 'style', which leans towards lower-cost, experimental, 'op-shop' garments:

Cheap and interesting is more the preferred approach to dressing, and certainly expensive clothing tends not to be *de rigueur* with students...Students have a remarkably sharp 'anti corporate' sensibility.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁶ For example, Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.5; PSW Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.7; Mr A. Van Krieken, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd and Mr D. Powers, Managing Director, Powers Textiles, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, pp.10-12; Mr A. Kenos, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

³⁷⁷ Mrs E. Sayers, Board Member, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.35.

³⁷⁸ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁷⁹ For example, Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2; Mr C. Croker, Year 5 Student, Spensley Street Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.12; Miss A. Kron, Year 6 Student, Princes Hill Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.8.

³⁸⁰ For example, Ms M. Pledger, Representative, Parent Association, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.4.

³⁸¹ For example, Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007, p.6; Merri Creek Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

³⁸² Mr D. Leach, Year 12 Student, Princes Hill Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, North Carlton, 31 July 2007, p.17.

³⁸³ Princes Hill Secondary College, Written Submission, May 2007.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.3.

Even in the absence of a uniform then, the Committee found that a school may develop a common standard of dress appropriate to its school community's culture and purchasing power.

The Committee therefore believes that the question of whether uniforms are cheaper than casual clothes cannot be answered without addressing the question of *which* uniform and *which* casual clothes. A basic school uniform is clearly less costly than expensive fashion clothing; on the other hand, an exclusive uniform complete with blazer and school logo will be significantly more expensive than a set of plain casual clothes from a department store. As will be shown in the discussion below, school uniforms in Victoria span a wide range of styles and associated costs, reflecting the preferences and priorities of each individual school community.

The Cost of School Uniforms

The Committee felt that it was important that the inquiry gain some indication of the actual costs of school uniforms across different sectors and year levels. To this end, the Committee examined the costs of 60 girls and 60 boys uniforms in a random sample of Victorian primary and secondary schools, across all sectors and metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas. The tables in the following sections show the average, lowest and highest costs of uniforms for boys and girls at primary and secondary levels for the sampled schools. While the relatively small sample size means that these figures are indicative only, they give useful insights into the vast range of costs involved in purchasing school uniforms in Victoria.

The Committee found that school uniforms in Victoria combine an incredibly wide variety of optional and compulsory garments, which may be available from a range of outlets at different prices, or specific to the school. The Committee acknowledges the limitations involved in making comparisons between such a diverse range of uniform policies and items. To assist with comparability across the sample, only a single set of basic, compulsory items were included in the analysis. However, it should be noted that the actual set of garments required by even the most basic school uniform is likely to be far more complex.

In the first place, few students would manage with only one of certain uniform items, including shirts or blouses, trousers, shorts, dresses and tights. The Committee is aware that the need to make multiple purchases can increase the cost of outfitting a student considerably. The Committee has also not factored in the cost of footwear (school socks, school shoes and sports footwear), which can be substantial, especially in schools where 'polishable' shoes are required. Most schools also have additional, optional uniform items from which students may choose. While students may not need each of these items, it is likely they will require at least some. Furthermore, schools may make additional items compulsory for certain year levels or groups, such as specific clothing for sports or cultural teams representing the school. The Committee therefore notes that while the costs of uniform items outlined below are substantial, the real cost of school clothing is likely to be significantly greater for most students and their families.

The Cost of Basic School Uniforms for Girls

For the purposes of the analysis, the Committee defined a girls basic summer uniform as a dress and a sun protective hat, as this constituted the girls summer uniform in the majority of schools in the sample. In schools where girls are not required to wear dresses, the Committee calculated an equivalent cost based on a girls basic top, shorts or skirt and a sun protective hat. A girls basic winter uniform was defined as a skirt, long-sleeve polo shirt or blouse, jumper and tights, with equivalent replacements used for schools in which the basic uniform differed from this model. Many secondary schools in the sample also require girls to wear a blazer and tie, so these have been included in the cost of the winter uniform, where they are compulsory.

Table 6.1 shows the lowest, highest and average costs of girls summer and winter uniforms in the sampled primary schools.

Table 6.1: Cost of basic school uniforms for primary school girls, by sector (2007)

	<i>Basic summer uniform</i>			<i>Basic winter uniform</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$29.45	\$57.75	\$43.19	\$71.00	\$162.40	\$123.17
Government	\$21.00	\$61.00	\$42.12	\$54.55	\$118.00	\$85.05
Independent	\$49.75	\$123.61	\$76.39	\$115.62	\$256.00	\$189.45
All schools	\$21.00	\$123.61	\$53.90	\$54.55	\$256.00	\$132.56

Note: Basic summer uniform includes dress and sun protective hat. Basic winter uniform includes skirt, long-sleeve shirt or blouse, jumper and tights.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

Based on the sample data, the average cost of a girls basic summer uniform for primary students in Victorian schools is \$53.90. Costs vary considerably between schools, from \$21.00 at one government school to \$123.61 at an independent school. A basic primary girls winter uniform was significantly more expensive, costing an average of \$132.56, with costs ranging from \$54.55 at a government school to \$256.00 at an independent school. The average cost of a combined girls primary school uniform was therefore found to be \$186.46 for a single set of garments for the school year.

Table 6.2 shows the lowest, highest and average costs of girls summer and winter uniforms in secondary schools.

Table 6.2: Cost of basic school uniforms for secondary school girls, by sector (2007)

	<i>Basic summer uniform</i>			<i>Basic winter uniform</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$60.00	\$132.50	\$80.94	\$120.00	\$411.90	\$328.71
Government	\$54.66	\$86.00	\$72.20	\$141.68	\$430.00	\$245.24
Independent	\$59.42	\$110.33	\$86.49	\$199.50	\$447.00	\$379.08
All schools	\$54.66	\$132.50	\$79.88	\$120.00	\$447.00	\$317.68

Note: Basic summer uniform includes dress and sun protective hat. Basic winter uniform includes skirt, long-sleeve shirt or blouse, jumper and tights, and blazer and/or tie where compulsory.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

The average cost of a basic summer uniform for secondary girls was higher (\$79.88), with prices ranging from \$54.66 at one government school to \$132.50 at a Catholic school. The cost of a secondary school girls basic winter uniform ranges from \$120.00 at a Catholic school without a compulsory blazer or tie, to \$447.00 at an independent school with compulsory blazer and tie.

The Cost of Basic School Uniforms for Boys

For boys, the Committee defined a basic summer uniform as shorts, a short-sleeve shirt and sun protective hat. A boys basic winter uniform was defined as trousers, a

long-sleeve shirt and jumper and, for secondary students, a blazer and/or tie where these items are compulsory. While the basic composition of a boys uniform was more consistent across schools in the sample than for girls, (ie a shirt of some kind, and trousers or shorts), the specific nature of such items varied considerably, from button-up dress shirts to simple polo or t-shirt styles.

Table 6.3 shows the lowest, highest and average costs for boys uniforms in the primary schools in the sample.

Table 6.3: Cost of basic school uniforms for primary school boys, by sector (2007)

	<i>Basic summer uniform</i>			<i>Basic winter uniform</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$38.00	\$53.75	\$45.53	\$52.00	\$131.28	\$92.81
Government	\$33.00	\$53.50	\$46.30	\$44.55	\$88.50	\$64.23
Independent	\$32.00	\$116.69	\$63.70	\$92.50	\$151.86	\$127.03
All schools	\$32.00	\$116.69	\$51.85	\$44.55	\$151.86	\$94.69

Note: Basic summer uniform includes shorts, short-sleeve shirt and sun protective hat. Basic winter uniform includes trousers, long-sleeve shirt, and jumper.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

A boys basic summer uniform in primary schools cost an average of \$51.85 across the Committee's sample. The Committee found that the costs of primary boys summer uniforms are similar in the government and Catholic sectors. In the independent sector, the cost varied substantially, with the most expensive uniform (\$116.69) costing more than three times as much as the cheapest uniform in the sector (\$32.00). The inclusion of a hat costing \$50.00 in the more expensive school (compared with a \$6.00 hat in the cheaper school), demonstrates the significant effect that a single item of uniform can have on its total cost. As was the case for girls, winter uniforms for boys at primary schools were more expensive, with the average cost across the sample ranging from \$64.23 for a basic winter uniform in the government sector, to \$127.03 in the independent sector.

Table 6.4 shows the lowest, highest and average costs for boys uniforms in the secondary schools in the sample.

Table 6.4: Cost of basic school uniforms for secondary school boys, by sector (2007)

	<i>Basic summer uniform</i>			<i>Basic winter uniform</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$55.00	\$97.00	\$74.92	\$122.00	\$361.33	\$261.50
Government	\$35.00	\$76.23	\$59.02	\$98.50	\$342.19	\$177.28
Independent	\$63.00	\$119.00	\$82.82	\$126.00	\$432.50	\$327.11
All schools	\$35.00	\$119.00	\$72.25	\$98.50	\$432.50	\$255.30

Note: Basic summer uniform includes shorts, short-sleeve shirt and sun protective hat. Basic winter uniform includes trousers, long-sleeve shirt, jumper, and blazer and/or tie where compulsory.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

A secondary boys basic summer uniform cost an average of \$72.25 across all secondary schools in the sample. The cheapest example occurred in a government

'Uniform is expensive and because it has a single purpose is a drain on some family's finances particularly when they enrol first at year 7. Our uniform is sensibly priced and it will cost a minimum of \$500 to get started.'

Committee Survey

school (\$35.00) and the most expensive in an independent school (\$119.00). A basic winter uniform cost an average of \$255.30. The average cost was significantly lower in the government sector (\$177.28), where schools are least likely to include costly additional items such as blazers and ties as a compulsory part of the uniform.

The Cost of Additional School Uniform Items

The above figures take into account basic uniform items only, including any compulsory blazers and/or ties for secondary students. Schools may include a number of additional compulsory items, which add to the total cost of school uniforms. For example, the Committee found that many schools in the sample (including all but three secondary schools) have separate sports uniforms which students are required to purchase, typically comprising a t-shirt or polo shirt, shorts and a tracksuit. The total cost of these items ranged in price from \$64.50 in a government primary school to \$257.80 in an independent secondary school. The average cost of a basic sports uniform (excluding footwear) in the sampled schools was \$106.72 for primary schools and \$162.58 for secondary schools.

Again, these prices reflect the cost of a basic sports uniform only. A number of schools, especially at secondary level, also specify additional items of clothing that are compulsory for physical education, such as sports caps, sports jumpers or rugby tops, netball skirts for girls, football shorts for boys, sports bags or swimwear. These items could increase the cost of clothing a child for school sports significantly, with one independent secondary school reaching a maximum cost of \$355.00 just for the compulsory items for its sports uniform. The Committee found that the average cost of a complete set of secondary sports clothing including all compulsory items (except footwear) was \$180.58. Costs for a basic sports uniform in secondary schools, and a full sports uniform incorporating additional compulsory items, are shown in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Cost of basic and full sports uniforms for secondary students, by sector (2007)

	<i>Basic sports uniform</i>			<i>Full compulsory sports uniform</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$123.00	\$220.50	\$162.58	\$123.00	\$257.50	\$172.01
Government	\$126.90	\$222.00	\$142.04	\$126.90	\$287.00	\$154.76
Independent	\$123.00	\$257.80	\$183.12	\$123.00	\$355.00	\$216.52
All schools	\$123.00	\$257.80	\$162.58	\$123.00	\$355.00	\$180.58

Note: Basic sports uniform includes shorts, t-shirt or polo shirt and tracksuit. Full compulsory sports uniform includes complete set of sports clothing required by schools in the sample (various items).

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

Many schools also include further essential items in their school uniforms, especially school bags and rain coats, spray jackets or other outer garments for winter. Bags at primary schools ranged in price from \$20.00 to \$82.66, with an average cost of \$38.29. Bags at secondary schools ranged from \$15.00 to \$71.00, with a greater proportion at the higher end of the cost range, bringing the average cost to \$55.83.

In primary schools, winter jackets (raincoat, spray jacket or other winter jacket) ranged from \$20.90 to \$39.95, averaging \$33.25. In secondary schools, winter jackets cost from \$25.00 to \$99.00, averaging \$60.50. While such items are not necessarily compulsory in all schools, they are typically the only such garments permitted should students need to wear a jacket during winter. They may therefore

reasonably be expected to be purchased for most students. The cost of a school bag and coat could therefore increase the cost of a school uniform by up to \$170.00 in some independent secondary schools. The range of costs for these essential items at primary and secondary level is shown in Tables 6.6 and 6.7 below.

Table 6.6: Cost of additional school uniform items for primary students, by sector (2007)

	<i>School bag</i>			<i>Raincoat/Spray jacket/Other</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$23.00	\$44.00	\$34.13	\$28.00	\$36.00	\$33.60
Government	\$20.00	\$40.00	\$33.14	\$20.90	\$39.95	\$32.04
Independent	\$35.00	\$82.66	\$47.90	\$28.00	\$38.00	\$34.10
All schools	\$20.00	\$82.66	\$38.39	\$20.90	\$39.95	\$33.25

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

Table 6.7: Cost of additional school uniform items for secondary students, by sector (2007)

	<i>School bag</i>			<i>Raincoat/Spray jacket/Other</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$35.00	\$71.00	\$56.25	\$45.00	\$85.00	\$67.25
Government	\$53.60	\$67.00	\$55.56	\$25.00	\$95.00	\$56.86
Independent	\$15.00	\$70.00	\$55.61	\$37.50	\$99.00	\$64.83
All schools	\$15.00	\$71.00	\$55.83	\$25.00	\$99.00	\$60.50

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

The Total Cost of School Uniforms

Tables 6.8 and 6.9 summarise the total indicative costs for a single set of compulsory or essential uniform items for summer and winter, for Victorian primary and secondary school students. The costs take account of

- one basic summer uniform;
- one basic winter uniform;
- one basic PE uniform;
- a blazer and/or tie if compulsory (for secondary students);
- one school bag; and
- either a raincoat, spray jacket or other winter jacket.

As shown in Table 6.8, the average total cost for a single set of compulsory school uniform items for primary students in the government sector is \$277.59 for girls and \$260.95 for boys. Table 6.9 shows that for secondary students in the government sector, the average cost of a full school uniform is \$586.62 for girls and \$491.31 for boys.

Table 6.8: Total cost for a single set of compulsory school uniform items for primary school students, by sector (2007)

	<i>Girls</i>			<i>Boys</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$239.00	\$405.25	\$322.78	\$233.00	\$358.81	\$294.76
Government	\$192.00	\$346.45	\$277.59	\$199.84	\$306.75	\$260.95
Independent	\$343.74	\$893.25	\$556.15	\$302.50	\$782.27	\$474.09
All schools	\$192.00	\$893.25	\$379.62	\$199.84	\$782.27	\$338.75

Note: Basic compulsory uniform for girls includes dress, sun protective hat, winter skirt, long-sleeve shirt or blouse, jumper, tights, winter jacket, PE uniform and school bag. Basic compulsory uniform for boys includes shorts, short-sleeve shirt, sun protective hat, trousers, long-sleeve shirt, jumper, winter jacket, PE uniform and school bag.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

Table 6.9: Total cost for a single set of compulsory school uniform items for secondary school students, by sector (2007)

	<i>Girls</i>			<i>Boys</i>		
	Lowest	Highest	Average	Lowest	Highest	Average
Catholic	\$397.75	\$792.92	\$667.36	\$400.70	\$708.20	\$576.78
Government	\$454.06	\$905.00	\$586.62	\$345.06	\$674.23	\$491.31
Independent	\$448.75	\$1010.80	\$740.16	\$364.50	\$936.58	\$691.35
All schools	\$454.06	\$1010.80	\$664.72	\$345.06	\$936.58	\$586.48

Note: Basic compulsory uniform for girls includes dress, sun protective hat, winter skirt, long-sleeve shirt or blouse, jumper, tights, blazer and/or tie where compulsory, winter jacket, PE uniform and school bag. Basic compulsory uniform for boys includes shorts, short-sleeve shirt, sun protective hat, trousers, long-sleeve shirt, jumper, blazer and/or tie where compulsory, winter jacket, PE uniform and school bag.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

Cost Differences for Girls and Boys School Uniforms

As shown in the analysis above, the Committee found that overall, the cost of school uniforms is higher for girls than for boys. In all sectors at both primary and secondary level, the average cost of a girls basic uniform was higher than that of a boys basic uniform. The greatest gender differential in the cost of school uniforms was seen in independent primary schools, where girls pay on average \$75.93 (32.0%) more than boys at the same school, for basic summer and winter uniform items. In the government sector, the greatest difference occurred at secondary level, with girls uniforms costing an average of \$58.80 (29.0%) more than boys. Table 6.10 show the differences between uniform prices for primary and secondary girls and boys across all sectors.

Table 6.10: Gender differences in total cost of school uniforms, by sector (2007)

	Primary		Secondary	
	Average additional cost for girls uniform (\$)	Average additional cost for girls uniform (%)	Average additional cost for girls uniform (\$)	Average additional cost for girls uniform (%)
Catholic	\$28.02	20.0%	\$34.40	9.1%
Government	\$16.64	14.6%	\$58.80	29.0%
Independent	\$75.93	32.0%	\$62.84	18.8%
All schools	\$40.20	22.2%	\$53.42	19.7%

Notes: Calculation based on the average cost of girls and boys basic uniforms, as defined in previous tables. Percentages reflect the additional cost of a girls uniform as a proportion of the cost of a boys uniform.

Composition of the sample for secondary schools in this table differs slightly from that in previous tables, as single sex schools have been excluded. Above figures are based on a comparison of the cost of a girls and boys basic school uniform in a total of 25 secondary schools.

Source: Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

The Committee found that the gender differences in uniform costs typically arose from more expensive items such as skirts, kilts, pinafores or dresses. These garments are often designed in school colours or tartans and are therefore unique to the school. In comparison, boys are more likely to be required to wear more generic garments such as shirts and trousers. Even if badged with the school logo, the Committee notes that these garments will typically be more readily accessible than custom-made designs that are unique to the school.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Committee notes that a significant price differential between girls and boys school uniforms could constitute discrimination on the grounds of gender, as it disadvantages one group—female students and their families—over another. At the same time, the Committee notes that in some cases, apparent price differentials in uniform costs may be offset by other considerations such as the purchase of duplicate garments. For example, a boy may require two pairs of school trousers, increasing the cost of his uniform, whereas a girl may require only a single school kilt. The Committee therefore recommends that co-educational schools undertake to make realistic comparisons between the costs of complete sets of school uniform items for girls and boys, and ensure that costs are as similar as practicable.

Impact of School Uniform Design on Costs

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines for schools currently recommend that schools select a uniform at an affordable price:

The range and choice of specified garments, their cost and availability must reflect the capacity of parents/guardians to provide them.³⁸⁵

As shown in the analysis above, the cost of a uniform is a substantial expense for the parents of school-aged children, even at schools where prices are kept at a minimum. At the top end of the price range, a single full set of compulsory school uniform items may cost over \$1000.00, even excluding footwear and the necessary purchase of duplicate items. While government and Catholic schools often provide

³⁸⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

'At times, I feel that the emphasis is all about the appearance rather than the functionality, and damn the expense!'

Susanne McCracken,
Parent

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

cheaper options than schools in the independent sector, they still typically require families to spend hundreds of dollars to outfit their children for school.

The Committee notes the goodwill shown by most parents and carers in their willingness to pay for a school uniform, as an important part of school life and a means of expressing their membership of the school community. The Committee believes it is the responsibility of schools to reciprocate this goodwill by choosing a uniform that does not impose an unnecessary or unreasonable financial burden on parents. As the Victorian Parents Council noted in its written submission, the price of a school uniform should reflect the socioeconomic make-up of the community:

It is very much an issue for each school community to decide what best reflects that particular school's culture and monetary demographic.³⁸⁶

Melton Primary School Council's written submission suggested that most schools succeed in finding a uniform that suits their community's expectations and purchasing capacity:

...we believe that most schools are able to set realistic expectations with regards to the purchase of their uniform items, specific to the financial circumstances of their community.³⁸⁷

While it may be desirable for the cost of a school uniform to be determined by the school community, the Committee believes that a school community should not be shaped by the cost of its uniform. Ms Leanne McCurdy, the parent of a child at a government school, argued in her written submission that government education should be available equally to all:

...no parent should be told by their local [government] school, that they should perhaps look at a different school because they cannot afford the uniform at that local school.³⁸⁸

The Committee notes that in the United Kingdom, the Office of Fair Trading has recently been called on to investigate the practice by some government schools of using expensive uniforms as a 'back-door selection process', to deter students from low-income backgrounds from enrolling.³⁸⁹

The Committee believes that all schools have a responsibility to ensure that the cost of a school uniform is set at a level which is affordable to the members of its school community. It could be argued that this is especially true for government schools, which are charged with providing education that is accessible to all Victorian students, irrespective of their socioeconomic background.

The Committee found that two key aspects of a school uniform can significantly affect its cost: (1) the range of compulsory items required by the school; and (2) the design of the garments themselves.

The Committee recognises that more expensive elements of a school uniform may be sufficiently highly valued by some school communities to justify their cost. However, at the same time, the Committee heard a number of arguments against additional items or designs that increase the cost of a school uniform. The two items that attracted the most comment were school blazers and compulsory school logos.

The Committee's survey found that blazers have a strong association with the later years of schooling. Only two primary schools (both from the independent sector) reported having a blazer as a compulsory part of their uniform.³⁹⁰ In public hearings, the vast majority of primary school students indicated that they felt that

³⁸⁶ Victorian Parents Council Inc, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

³⁸⁷ Melton Primary School Council, Written Submission June, 2007, pp.1-2.

³⁸⁸ Ms L. McCurdy, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007, p.2.

³⁸⁹ BBC News, 'Schools warned over uniform costs', 18 February 2007, BBC News website, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6369213.stm>>, accessed on 18 September 2007.

³⁹⁰ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

blazers are unnecessary and undesirable in a primary school uniform.³⁹¹ Secondary students' attitudes to blazers were mixed, ranging from a preference for a more casual uniform,³⁹² to appreciation of the school blazer's image of pride and sophistication.³⁹³ The average cost of a blazer for a Victorian secondary student ranges from around \$160.00 in Catholic schools to over \$190.00 in independent schools.³⁹⁴

The Committee's survey also found that blazers are strongly associated with the non-government sector (refer Figure 6.1). Over half (54.5%) the non-government schools in Victoria with secondary students require some or all of their students to wear blazers, compared with only 13.2 per cent of government schools with secondary students. In the Catholic sector, 72.3 per cent of schools with secondary students require all of their students to wear a compulsory blazer.³⁹⁵

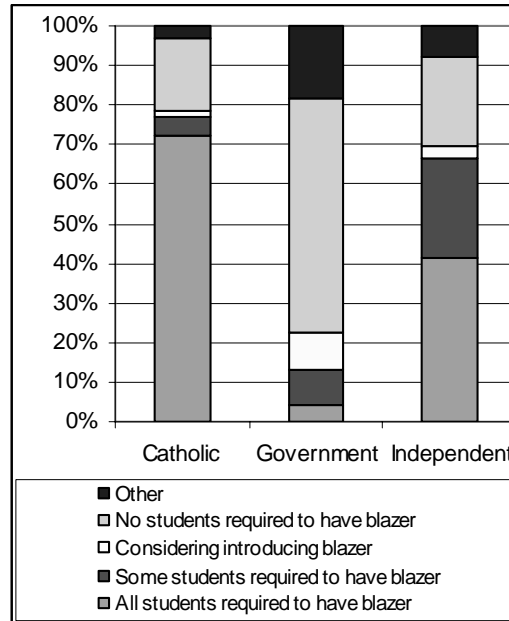
The Committee acknowledges that many schools feel that in order to improve their public image, they must adopt more formal or expensive uniform items. For example, Whittlesea Secondary College's written submission explained the pressure faced by government schools to raise their standards for student appearance:

It is becoming a trend for school uniforms in the government system to become more formal, neater and more distinctive and is often used as a marketing tool when surrounded by private schools or government schools that have upgraded their uniform. Unfortunately we live in a competitive environment where the community is quick to judge unkempt, untidy, faded and outdated fabrics and styles.³⁹⁶

School uniform manufacturers, including Noone Imagewear, also outlined the trend for government school uniforms to be used as a marketing strategy to attract new students:

In recent years, the Noone Group have designed new ranges for many government schools which were looking to enhance their overall image. This involved the provision of a more "private school" appearance with the use of blazers, wool jumpers and ties taking pride of place. It is evident, schools are using their image as part of their strategic marketing campaigns to attract new students.³⁹⁷

Figure 6.1: Policies on school blazers in Victorian schools with secondary students, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁹¹ Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.20.

³⁹² Mr J. Trew, Year 11 Student, Apollo Bay P-12 College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.7.

³⁹³ Ms S. Cashin, Year 11 Student, Werribee Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.35.

³⁹⁴ Education and Training Committee analysis of 60 school uniform policies and price lists, October 2007.

³⁹⁵ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

³⁹⁶ Whittlesea Secondary College, Written Submission, July 2007, pp.2-3.

³⁹⁷ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p1.

'...there are uniforms and uniforms. There are some school uniforms that are not much better than what you see if you go to Port Phillip Prison to visit people in their uniform. Then, of course, you have the private school kids getting around in designer-type things.'

Les Twentyman,
Outreach Worker, Open
Family Australia

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Mr Anton Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, also discussed the impact of increasing competitiveness among schools on the cost of school uniforms:

It seems to me that there is a shift towards private school education. Sometimes people assess those by the uniforms and grounds, and to a degree I think some [government] high schools are saying, 'We will compete in that market, and we will move from the more casual windcheaters and bomber jackets to the more expensive blazers'.³⁹⁸

In its written submission, Parents Victoria remarked that the trend towards more expensive uniform items in government schools may sometimes be resented by school communities:

Some public schools are including garments more traditionally associated with private schools eg blazers, ties and hats related to school image. These garments are often not supported when mandated – their cost can be prohibitive and they are more costly to maintain (laundering, dry cleaning, hand washing, etc).³⁹⁹

As noted in Chapter 4, the Committee received a number of written submissions from parents concerned about the introduction of a compulsory blazer at their children's school. The submissions indicated that the blazer is not only expensive, but also impractical and unnecessary.⁴⁰⁰ One of the parents, Ms Karen Rolands, argued that such items should never be made compulsory in school uniform policies:

Expensive unnecessary items such as blazers should always be kept as optional items. This means that parents and students have the right to choose, [and] parents who are struggling with their financial situation are not forced to make things worse unnecessarily.⁴⁰¹

This view was supported in a comment on Parents Victoria's online school uniform forum:

Blazers, ties, hats such as bashers (boaters) are not sensible or practical items and should not be required. These would make any uniform more expensive as well.⁴⁰²

One of the students participating in a public hearing confirmed the view that school blazers are often used for decorative, rather than practical purposes:

Today I am wearing a blazer but pretty much every other day of the year I will not be wearing a blazer. If you went to my school right now, you would not see one person wearing a blazer. It is more of a decorative thing than anything else.⁴⁰³

Another parent, Ms Carolyn Mann, added in her written submission that the expense of laundering a blazer further increases its cost:

Laundering becomes impractical because of the logistics of laundering when a student is expected to wear the item (blazer) every day. At \$170 for a blazer, which I might add can only be dry-cleaned – it is impractical to have a spare!⁴⁰⁴

The Committee acknowledges that items such as blazers are perceived by many to be non-essential items. The Committee believes that blazers should therefore not be included in a school uniform policy in which cost to parents is a primary concern. However, the Committee notes that many schools have found ways to include a blazer in their school uniforms, while minimising the associated costs or inconvenience for students and families. Twelve schools in the Committee's survey

³⁹⁸ Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.6.

³⁹⁹ Parents Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁰⁰ Ms M. Reith, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007; Ms C. Mann, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007; Ms L. McCurdy, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007; Ms B. Johns, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007; Ms K. Clarke & Mr L. Challis, Parents, Written Submission, June 2007; Ms K. Rolands, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007.

⁴⁰¹ Ms K. Rolands, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁴⁰² Mr R. Polacsek, 'Should school uniforms be compulsory?', *Parents Victoria online forum*, 10 September 2007, Parents Victoria website, <<http://www.cybertext.net.au/pv/discussion.htm>>.

⁴⁰³ Mr R. Nyaguy, Year 10 Student, Sandringham College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.36.

⁴⁰⁴ Ms C. Mann, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007, p.3.

indicated that their uniform includes an optional blazer, although one also noted that 'no students currently take this option'. A further nine schools reported keeping a stock of blazers on hand to loan to students representing the school.⁴⁰⁵ The Committee suggests that these types of compromises can be an appropriate way for government schools to achieve their aims with respect to school image, while fulfilling their obligation to keep uniform costs accessible to all families in their communities.

Both the Smith Family and the State Schools' Relief Committee reported that another major contributing factor in rising uniform costs is the trend towards specific garments with school logos, rather than generic garments.⁴⁰⁶ The impact of logos on the cost of school uniforms was also noted in a number of written submissions from parents. For example:

...the fact it has to have the school logo...makes the items very expensive for many parents. The same items without the logos can be purchased at various large retail stores for about \$5 to \$8 but through the school it is FOUR times this cost.⁴⁰⁷

Government schools should provide parents with alternate, affordably priced outlets to purchase mandatory uniforms (or at least some parts of the uniform such as, 'grey pants', socks, polo shirts)... For example – the purchase of long grey pants at our local school uniform shop vs buying the same pants (minus logo on back pocket) at Target Stores – varies by over 100 per cent (\$55 at School Uniform shop. \$25 – \$30 at local Target Store). We should not be pedantic about a logo on a back pocket which cannot be seen anyway!⁴⁰⁸

Furthermore, some schools explained that their decision not to have a logo on school uniform items was motivated by a desire to reduce costs to students and families by giving them a choice of purchasing outlets.⁴⁰⁹

Nevertheless, the Committee also heard some comments in support of school logos. One parent from the Valkstone Primary School community expressed a preference for the uniformity that a single uniform brand or supplier imparts:

I like everyone looking smart in the same uniform, rather than bits bought at different shops.⁴¹⁰

Mr Hugh Kroker, Year 6 Student, St Kilda Park Primary School, argued that the school logo was central to the purpose of the uniform:

I think there should be a logo, because if you do not have one there is not really much point in having uniforms. If you represent your school and do not have a logo people could think you are from a different school.⁴¹¹

Mr Shane Colley, Year 6 Student, Belvedere Park Primary School, observed that two of the schools' uniforms at the public hearing he attended were very similar, and the logo was therefore necessary to tell them apart.⁴¹²

The Committee's survey asked schools to indicate whether their school uniform included any of the following items with a school logo on them: bag, blazer, hat, jumper, PE/sports shirt or uniform, shirt/blouse, t-shirt/polo shirt or windcheater. The Committee found that schools in the Catholic and independent sectors are the most likely to include such items with school logos in their school uniforms (refer Figure 6.2). The majority of schools in these two sectors have at least four items

⁴⁰⁵ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴⁰⁶ Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.6; Mr D. Schmidt, Manager, State Schools' Relief Committee, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁰⁷ Mr P. Thompson & Ms N. Fidge, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴⁰⁸ Ms L. McCurdy, Parent, Written Submission, April 2007, p.1.

⁴⁰⁹ For example, Sherbourne Primary School, Written Submission, July 2007, p.1.

⁴¹⁰ Parent Community, Valkstone Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.21.

⁴¹¹ Mr H. Kroker, Year 6 Student, St Kilda Park Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.20.

⁴¹² Mr S. Colley, Year 6 Student, Belvedere Park Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.20.

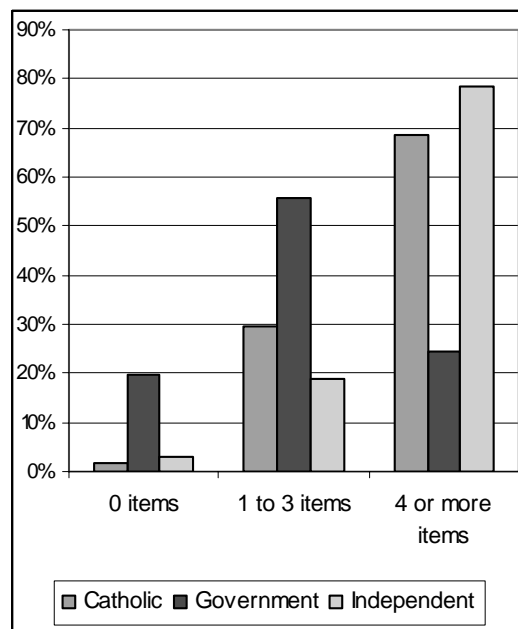
with the school logo on them. Logos are less common in government schools: 19.6 per cent of government schools have no items with a school logo, and less than one quarter require students to have four or more school uniform items with a school logo.⁴¹³

The most common items to include a logo are t-shirts/polo shirts and windcheaters, which are required to have a logo in 68.8 per cent of Victorian school uniforms. The next most common items to require a school logo are jumpers (required to have a logo in 59.4% of schools), clothing for PE (55.4%), school bags (40.8%) and hats (38.7%).

The Committee heard that as with blazers, schools may adopt a variety of different approaches to ensure that the inclusion of school logos does not unduly affect the price of school uniforms. Some schools told the Committee that their uniform is comprised mostly of generic garments available in a variety of outlets, with a small number of garments with the school logo available exclusively through the school.⁴¹⁴ Others offer school logos as patches, which can be ironed or sewn on to generic garments.⁴¹⁵ The Committee supports such initiatives as appropriate means for schools to balance the advantages of having a school logo against the potential impact on the cost of the uniform.

The Committee notes the above evidence and particularly, the widespread concerns about the impact of design decisions on the overall cost of school uniforms in the government school sector. The Committee believes that government schools should be required to undertake a rigorous, transparent assessment of the appropriate cost of a school uniform for their communities. This assessment should include careful consideration of the specific items to be incorporated into a school uniform, as well as the specifications for these items.

Figure 6.2: Number of school uniform items required to have a school logo in Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Recommendation 6.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to demonstrate to their school communities that they have evaluated the cost implications of their selected school uniform to ensure that costs fall within expectations of the school community.

⁴¹³ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴¹⁴ Manangatang P-12 College Council, Written Submissions, May 2007, p.1; Footscray City Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴¹⁵ Trafalgar Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007 p.2; Rosanna Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

Assistance for Low Income Families

No matter how attentive schools are to the purchasing capacity of their communities when selecting a uniform, there will always be some families for whom the purchase of a school uniform presents a significant financial burden. The Committee heard from community organisations such as the Salvation Army and Open Family Australia that many families struggle to meet the costs of schooling, such as the purchase of school uniforms:

...it needs to be recognised that for many Australian families living on low incomes the provision of school uniforms is cost prohibitive...The Salvation Army currently assists many families who simply cannot afford the cost of education expenses at the beginning of each school year.⁴¹⁶

...the mere fact that families cannot afford the very basics is a huge concern to us. And it is not just the basic uniform; now they have to have sports uniforms as well and things of that nature.⁴¹⁷

The Committee also received written submissions from parents and families experiencing difficulties purchasing uniforms, such as the comment below from the grandparent of three school-age children:

My family find the cost of uniforms to be so astronomical and really eats into their household budget, so much so that they have to do without other essential needs.⁴¹⁸

The Committee is concerned to hear that meeting the cost of a school uniform may be affecting the ability of some families to afford other essential educational items for their children.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advises schools that exemptions to dress codes or school uniform policies must be provided where 'the student or the parents/guardians can demonstrate particular economic hardship that prevents them from complying with the code'.⁴¹⁹ However, the Department acknowledges that in such cases, principals should consider whether it may be preferable to provide financial assistance:

When considering whether an exemption on the grounds of economic hardship should be made, the principal will need to decide whether or not to grant financial or other assistance to the parent(s)/guardian(s) to enable the student to comply with the dress code without stigma or undue embarrassment. This may be appropriate if the school council wishes to maintain a sense of school identity rather than grant an exemption.⁴²⁰

The Committee's survey found that schools tend to prefer to provide support to students in financial difficulty, rather than exemptions. Only 31.2 per cent of schools indicated that an exemption on such grounds would be provided, with a number of schools explaining that such exemptions are unnecessary due to the availability of financial assistance with the cost of school uniform items.⁴²¹

Students from government schools participating in this inquiry spoke passionately about the need to assist students and families struggling to purchase uniforms. As shown in the comments below, opinion was divided as to whether this support should come from the government, or from the school community:

Schools have a responsibility to help families with financial difficulties purchase uniforms for their children.⁴²²

⁴¹⁶ The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division, Written Submission, April 2007, p.1.

⁴¹⁷ Mr L. Twentyman, Outreach Worker, Open Family Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.30.

⁴¹⁸ Ms E. Dickin, Grandparent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴¹⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*

⁴²¹ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴²² Ms C. Forrester, Year 10 Student, Shepparton High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.28.

'It would be wonderful to have all students in uniform, with a proportion of funding to support this. Often our government schools in lower income areas struggle to adhere to a proud look. Uniform for many of our children is a real struggle.'

Committee Survey

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

...If the government is making [students] go to school and they cannot afford a uniform it should be helping them buy one.⁴²³

Written submissions from the education departments in Queensland and South Australia noted that the responsibility to support students in need rests with schools, both in selecting affordable uniforms and in organising for financial support to be provided.⁴²⁴ However, most state governments in Australia provide some form of financial assistance to students for the purchase of school uniforms, either through designated uniform funds, or through general education support. The Committee agrees that the Victorian Government has a direct role in providing financial support to help needy families meet the cost of purchasing a school uniform.

The Victorian Government provides students and their families with opportunities to access financial support for general educational purposes, which may contribute to the purchase of school uniforms. The Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is a bi-annual payment provided by the Victorian Government to parents or carers of children under 16 who receive a Centrelink benefit, and hold a Health Care or Pensioners card. The total annual EMA payment made to parents and carers is \$210 for primary students and \$420 for secondary students. An equivalent amount is also paid to the child's school.⁴²⁵ In addition, the Victorian Government provides the School Start bonus—a one-off payment of \$300 made to parents and carers of students beginning Prep or Year 7—to help with the costs associated with starting at a new school.⁴²⁶ The Committee notes that a new uniform may be a significant component of such costs.

The Committee's survey found that support for families in need is also provided at a school level, with only 12.5 per cent of schools responding that no support is available for covering the cost of their uniform.⁴²⁷ These schools, predominantly in the independent sector, have low numbers of students receiving the Educational Maintenance Allowance, suggesting that financial assistance may not be needed for their students. Other schools indicated that they use a range of approaches to provide financial assistance to students and their families, as shown in Figure 6.3.

⁴²³ Ms C. Lee, Year 6 Student, Essendon Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.21.

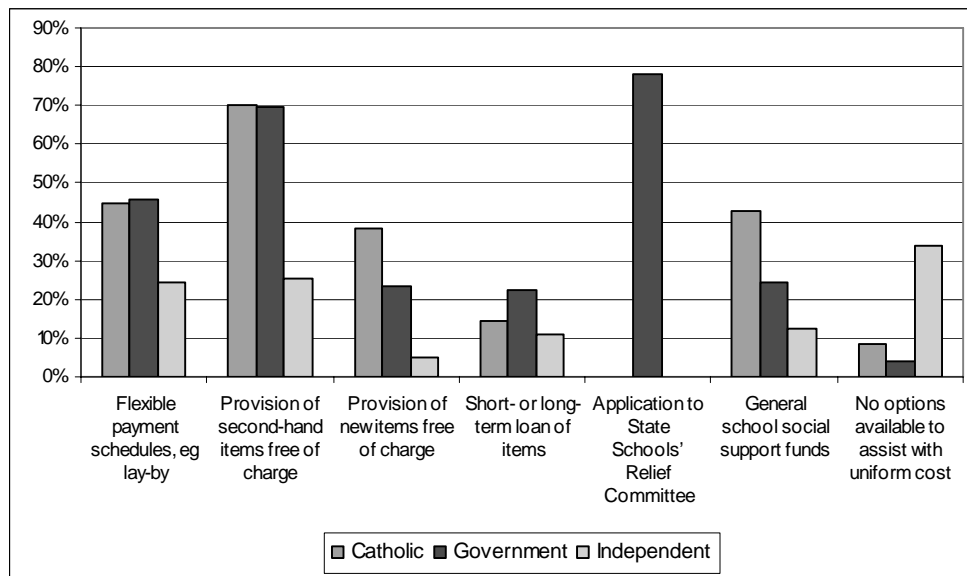
⁴²⁴ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia), Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland), Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁴²⁵ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website, 'Education Maintenance Allowance: Information for Schools', <<http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/ema/spayments.htm>>.

⁴²⁶ For further information, refer to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/lifeatschool/schoolstartfaq.htm>>.

⁴²⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Figure 6.3: Types of assistance with the cost of school uniforms provided by Victorian schools, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Written submissions from schools also revealed a range of strategies for supporting families struggling to meet the cost of a school uniform. Swan Marsh Primary School assists families receiving the EMA by giving them the portion of the EMA that the school receives on their behalf:

I have also introduced to EMA families the option of receiving back the money received for them by the school if they redeem it towards a school uniform. All parents chose to do this.⁴²⁸

Galvin Park Secondary College also supports students through EMA credit arrangements,⁴²⁹ while Tallangatta Secondary College sometimes supplies uniforms free of charge to families in need:

In exceptional circumstances, our school provides students with items of uniform at a reduced or no cost to ensure all students are in uniform. This is a local exemption process that is viewed as very supportive and acknowledges individual needs.⁴³⁰

Rowville Secondary College has a budget to support families in disadvantaged circumstances, administered by the Student Welfare Coordinators.⁴³¹ Similarly, Footscray City Primary School maintains a 'social action fund' to which parents are invited to make donations, which are then used to purchase uniforms and other necessities for students in need.⁴³² Croydon Community School, which does not have a uniform, also indicated that it supports struggling students through clothing donations:

Some of our students wear the same clothes every day, every week and the school provides donated clothing items on a regular basis to make sure that students can rotate clothing for washing purposes and in response to weather conditions.⁴³³

The Committee therefore found that even schools without uniforms are sometimes called on to provide financial support for student clothing.

The Committee found that the most common method of support is the provision of second-hand items of clothing, free of charge. This option is available to students

⁴²⁸ Ms S. Porzig, Acting Principal, Swan Marsh Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴²⁹ Galvin Park Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁴³⁰ Tallangatta Secondary College School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴³¹ Rowville Secondary College School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁴³² Footscray City Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴³³ Croydon Community School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

in need in 61.1 per cent of schools.⁴³⁴ However, Dr Mark Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, noted that this practice can stigmatise students if not implemented sensitively:

A smart school has a supply of uniforms which it can give under the table to people — indigenous and non-indigenous — who are in real need. After someone leaves the school that uniform is superfluous, so often they are re-donated back. Sometimes they are ill-fitting, and the last thing that any school would want to do is hear, 'You're wearing the dodgy uniform — you know, the one that was given to you'.⁴³⁵

The Victorian guidelines for dress codes and school uniform policies advise schools to exercise confidentiality and sensitivity in processing requests for uniform exemptions, including requests made on the grounds of financial difficulty.⁴³⁶ The Committee believes that schools should exercise the same care in providing material support such as second-hand uniforms, to ensure that students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds are not singled out in the school community.

The Committee's survey found that the second most common option for supporting financially disadvantaged families is flexible payment schedules, available at 43.6 per cent of schools.⁴³⁷ Open Family Australia and the Salvation Army both mentioned to the Committee that the beginning of the school year is a particularly trying time for low-income families:

Unfortunately Victoria is one of the few states, if not the only state, that does not provide textbooks for secondary students. With that being the first hurdle comes the other hurdles, particularly on top of Christmas when families have already been plunged into massive financial problems and, as I said, then the schoolbooks and then the school fees and the school uniforms all hitting at the one time. It really does become a major trauma.⁴³⁸

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.⁴³⁹

Flexible payment options may therefore be a viable option for schools to consider, so that families can spread the cost of purchasing a school uniform over time.

State Schools' Relief Committee

Among government schools, the most commonly provided form of assistance is an application to the State Schools' Relief Committee (SSRC).⁴⁴⁰ The SSRC was established in the early 1900s to assist families affected by bushfires and drought with the costs of education. Since 1940, the Education Department has funded its administration and staffing, while the funding provided by the SSRC to purchase school clothing comes from donations from schools, businesses, philanthropic trusts and individuals. The Committee heard one such example in a public hearing, with Mr Anthony Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, noting that the company makes a 'significant donation' annually to the SSRC.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁴ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴³⁵ Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007.

⁴³⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁴³⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴³⁸ Mr L. Twentyman, Outreach Worker, Open Family Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.30.

⁴³⁹ The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division, Written Submission, April 2007, p.2.

⁴⁴⁰ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴⁴¹ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.6.

The SSRC provides assistance either through the direct provision of generic school uniform garments from its bulk stores, or through purchase authorisations to fixed limits for school-specific garments. The number of purchase authorisations made by the SSRC rose by 10.2 per cent between 2006 and 2007, while direct stock provision declined.⁴⁴² This shift in activity represents a significant increase in costs, as it is cheaper for the SSRC to provide clothing directly rather than to authorise purchases. The cost of purchase authorisations has also increased significantly. The average amount provided per applicant jumped by 17.7 per cent: from \$108.25 in 2006 to \$127.74 in 2007.⁴⁴³

The result of these trends is that the total assistance provided by the SSRC increased by 29.7 per cent, from \$363,749 in 2006, to \$471,677 in 2007.⁴⁴⁴ In its written submission, the SSRC cited the following reasons for its increase in expenditure: a movement towards more specific and expensive clothing required by schools; changes in the procurement and distribution methods chosen by schools; and greater needs among families.⁴⁴⁵ The SSRC is now concerned that costs are rising at a rate that will soon become unsustainable with current funding levels.⁴⁴⁶

Mr David Schmidt, Manager, State Schools' Relief Committee, suggested a number of ways in which the SSRC might increase its funding base. He indicated that secondary schools might improve their financial commitment, as primary schools currently make the more significant contribution.⁴⁴⁷ He also suggested that other government agencies might support the SSRC in areas of policy overlap; for example, assistance from the Australian immigration department to ease the pressure on the SSRC from increased refugee populations in metropolitan areas.⁴⁴⁸

The importance of the SSRC was recognised in evidence from across all key groups in the school community, including the Association of School Councils in Victoria,⁴⁴⁹ the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals,⁴⁵⁰ Parents Victoria,⁴⁵¹ and the Victorian Student Representative Council.⁴⁵²

Nevertheless, the Committee also heard the view that the current level of support provided by the SSRC is not sufficient for those families who do apply for assistance. In a written submission, Pakenham Hills Primary School Council reported that it has difficulty accessing SSRC funds because families are sometimes unwilling or unable to cover the remainder of the cost of uniform items:

We have noted as a school that parents who have come in to access State Schools' Relief Uniform support are not even willing to pay their small share of the uniform cost through this avenue. Of the 10 families who wanted to access school uniforms through state school relief, only 2 were willing to pay the small contribution required of them.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴² The State Schools' Relief Committee reported to the Education and Training Committee that the number of purchase authorisations rose from 3,354 in 2006 to 3,695 in 2007.

⁴⁴³ State Schools' Relief Committee, Written Submission, June 2007, p3.

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp.3-4.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.6.

⁴⁴⁷ Mr D. Schmidt, Manager, State Schools' Relief Committee, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.6.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p4.

⁴⁴⁹ Mr S. Franz-Ford, Chief Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.12.

⁴⁵⁰ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.3.

⁴⁵¹ Ms G. McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.40.

⁴⁵² Victorian Student Representative Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁴⁵³ Pakenham Hills Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

In a public hearing, Ms Gail McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, also provided an example where SSRC funding had been insufficient to assist a family in need:

...what they can afford to resource is very difficult... I have an example of a young girl in senior high school who was in the same calliper shoes for about four, five years. It was a bit worrying but her mother couldn't afford to change them. When we made an application it was knocked back. In fact that money would have only bought part of the shoe.⁴⁵⁴

The Committee was provided with a recent newsletter from Whittlesea Secondary College, which shows how the school introduced changes to the eligibility criteria on applications to the SSRC, to cope with high demand for its services:

Due to extremely high demand on new uniform from State School's Relief, we have found it necessary to review the manner in which families apply for uniform consideration. To be eligible for assistance, you MUST be getting EMA allowance and be on either a Health Care Card or hold a Pension Card. You must also be experiencing severe financial difficulties ie have one or both family members unemployed. All families requiring assistance with uniforms from State School's Relief will be required to make an appointment to see me to discuss their financial hardships. This must be done face-to-face and cannot be done over the phone. After consultation with our Principal, a decision will be made regarding application to State School's Relief⁴⁵⁵

A key recommendation made to the Committee by the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals was that the government financially support the SSRC, so that families in financial hardship might be more directly assisted.⁴⁵⁶ Wangaratta High School Council made the same recommendation in its submission.⁴⁵⁷

The current level of use of the SSRC is an area that may warrant further analysis. A submission received from Parents Victoria voiced concern that some schools are taking advantage of the SSRC, ahead of other needier families.⁴⁵⁸ However, Mr Schmidt did not share this concern:

That is important for you to know, that schools have complied, they are not overusing us, and there is considerable evidence that schools underuse us...Certainly the relief committee believes many worthy cases are not being adequately attended to.⁴⁵⁹

Mr Schmidt went on to suggest that schools may be holding back from submitting SSRC applications because of concern for its sustainability:

...two principals that I spoke to just before coming here today...were saying, 'No, we do not make applications because we do not want to overuse you. We have many needy families'. I asked them, 'How do you deal with those families?'. And they said, 'We are frightened if we start with the State Schools Relief Committee, people will know it, and then there will be floodgates'.⁴⁶⁰

Mr Anton Leschen from the Smith Family described a similar example:

The school has access to the Geelong Community Foundation, which offers \$50 clothing vouchers. The school uses this fund to supply Target vouchers for shoes rather than put pressure on the State School Relief Fund, which is under great stress.⁴⁶¹

The Committee found that around 22 percent of government schools (including some with high numbers of students receiving the EMA) do not make applications to the SSRC on behalf of their communities.⁴⁶² It therefore appears to the

⁴⁵⁴ Ms G. McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, pp.40-41.

⁴⁵⁵ Whittlesea Secondary College Newsletter, 18 October 2006. Copy supplied by Ms B. Johns, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007.

⁴⁵⁶ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.7.

⁴⁵⁷ Wangaratta High School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴⁵⁸ Parents Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁵⁹ Mr D. Schmidt, Manager, State Schools' Relief Committee, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.5.

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁴⁶¹ Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.3.

⁴⁶² Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

Committee that even the recently increased demands on SSRC services do not represent the full extent of demand for assistance with the cost of school uniforms in Victorian government schools.

The Committee joins with contributors to this inquiry in commending the efforts of the SSRC to support Victorian students experiencing financial hardship. At the same time, the Committee acknowledges that demand for support with school uniform costs in government schools exceeds what the SSRC is currently able to provide. Given the Committee's view that the Victorian Government has a responsibility to support all students in need with reasonable costs of purchasing a school uniform, the Committee recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate ways in which it might further support the activities of the State Schools' Relief Committee.

The Committee also notes that as the SSRC was established to serve the government school sector, it does not provide financial assistance to Victorian students in the non-government sector. Few Catholic or independent schools report having a general school fund for offering financial support to assist with the costs of school uniforms.⁴⁶³ These schools either employ alternative forms of support, especially the provision of second-hand items free of charge, or do not offer support to their students at all. As indicated above, many such schools have student populations from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, so may not experience demand for financial assistance. Nevertheless, the Committee is aware that many schools in both the Catholic and independent sectors do have significant populations of students in need. The Committee therefore urges the relevant non-government education authorities to investigate options for system-wide support for students needing financial assistance with the cost of school uniforms. A model similar to the SSRC, whereby schools donate to a managed fund, may be viable in other sectors as well.

Recommendation 6.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate strategies to ensure the continuation and possible expansion of the activities of the State Schools' Relief Committee, and/or alternative models for financial support for assistance with school uniforms.

Recommendation 6.3: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to include in their dress codes and school uniform policies information about the options available for low-income families to access financial support, to help them meet the costs of school clothing.

Conclusion

The Committee found that the design of a school uniform can play an important role in representing the culture and image of a school. For some schools, especially in the independent sector, expensive, traditional uniforms are an important demonstration of the status the school wishes to portray. For many schools, however, expensive uniform items are regarded as both unnecessary and undesirable, and uniforms are chosen with an emphasis on low cost and practical maintenance.

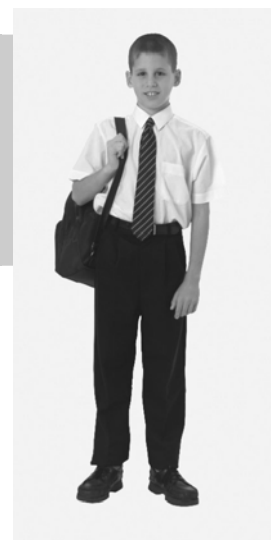
The Committee also notes that the cost of a school uniform has a significant financial impact on many families, especially those in disadvantaged circumstances. It is the Committee's view that because wearing a uniform constitutes an important aspect of participation in school life in the majority of Victorian schools, no student should be denied access to a school uniform because of their financial situation. Schools should therefore be required to give careful consideration to all associated costs and their likely impact on the school community, when making decisions about their dress codes and school uniform

⁴⁶³ *ibid.*

policies. Additionally, the Victorian Government should play a direct role in assisting needy families with reasonable costs associated with purchasing a school uniform. The Committee also believes that dress codes and school uniform policies should include advice to students and their families about how to access appropriate support with meeting the costs of school clothing.

Chapter 7:

Purchasing and Distribution



Introduction

We feel that it is currently the case that the uniform shop is 'too difficult' for educators and administrators to contemplate.⁴⁶⁴

If schools choose to adopt a uniform policy that includes specific garments or other items, they are then required to make arrangements for the supply and distribution of those items. Schools have a number of options available to them in purchasing and distributing school uniform items, requiring them to make potentially complex business decisions that may affect all members of their school community. Based on discussion with its members, the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd reported that 'considerable problems exist with the current methods of buying and distributing uniforms from the perspective of manufacturers'.⁴⁶⁵ The Committee heard that such issues relate to Australian versus overseas manufacturing; materials and manufacturing processes for school uniform items; school uniform purchasing arrangements; and the management of school uniform shops. This chapter discusses the evidence received in each of these areas throughout the course of this inquiry, and examines the issue of profits on sales of school uniforms in Victorian schools.

Australian Versus Overseas Manufacturing

The Committee notes that industry trends over the last decade have resulted in an increasing number of school uniform products being manufactured overseas. School uniform manufacturer Noone Imagewear argued that increased competition from manufacturers in China, Fiji, Indonesia and Vietnam has benefited Australian consumers by reducing school uniform costs:

The uniform industry has undergone significant restructuring of its manufacturing process in Australia over the last 10 years. This has led to many uniform items being produced overseas. It is common to see products now Made in China/Fiji/Indonesia/Vietnam. This has given school uniforms a new competitive edge, where the prices are significantly cheaper in real terms than ever before.⁴⁶⁶

However, Spartan School Supplies noted that the price competitiveness of off-shore manufacturing has caused a decline in local manufacturing of school uniforms:

Local manufacturing is shrinking as the labour costs associated are unaffordable. Currently the buyer dictates the sell prices in this niche market, and this places pressure upon the manufacturing chain down to the fabric supply. This is where manufacturing has no choice other than to go off-shore.⁴⁶⁷

Beleza Pty Ltd suggested that the decline in local manufacture and supply is the biggest challenge currently facing the school uniform industry:

The most problematic challenge associated with the manufacture and supply of school clothing and associated items is the significant decline in the number of local manufacturers and suppliers. Due to changes in the industry and market dynamics of the supply chain, local competition has been increasingly reduced.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

⁴⁶⁵ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁴⁶⁶ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴⁶⁷ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, pp.3-4.

⁴⁶⁸ Beleza Pty Ltd, Written Submission, July 2007, p.1.

'We believe that wherever possible the uniform should be Australian made to keep money and jobs within the country.'

David Dodemaide, Year 11 Student, Bacchus Marsh College

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

PSW Pty Ltd also reported moving some of its manufacturing overseas due to a decline in the local textile industry. The Managing Director, Mr Anthony Sterpin, suggested that the industry is now 'somewhere between 5 per cent and 10 per cent of what it was 15 years ago'.⁴⁶⁹

On the other hand, Mr Ashley Van Krieken, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, reported that the local textile, clothing, footwear and fashion industry remains competitive:

...the Australian textile, clothing, footwear and fashion industry, contrary perhaps to the views of many in the community, is a vibrant, innovative and in many areas a growing sector in Australia, and particularly in Victoria...⁴⁷⁰

In its written submission, the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd noted that a growing focus on niche products has made the school uniform market particularly important for the Victorian textile, clothing and footwear industry:

The industry has undergone a significant period of rationalisation and this has produced a range of companies focusing on niche product areas and production processes. As such the production of school wear and associated articles is a strong area of growth for the Victorian TCF industry.⁴⁷¹

The Council reported that there are currently more than 140 companies in Victoria operating in the area of school uniform supply from which schools can choose.⁴⁷²

The Committee heard a number of arguments in favour of school uniform items that are manufactured in Australia. Mr Anthony Sterpin noted that Australian made textiles are required to adhere to high quality assurance standards:

There are Australian standards for textiles on how a product should perform: things like colour fastness to washing, peeling; colour fastness to light; consistency of colour to the master; and other key performance factors.⁴⁷³

Similarly, Mr Van Krieken expressed concern that the growing number of imported products is causing a decline in quality in the school uniform industry:

Some of our members have noted that an increasing number of imported products are probably below the standard of Australian-made products... we are certainly concerned that in itself that is tinging the uniform sector as a whole...⁴⁷⁴

Ms Gwen Harrison, Victorian Schoolwear Manager, Lowes, noted that it is more difficult to control quality when manufacturing clothing offshore:

It is hard to control the quality from overseas. Some companies have factories overseas and I guess they can have someone over there for quality control but I know that, in dealings the company I work for has had with imports, what comes in this year may be a bit different next year, so unless you have really tight controls overseas, it is very hard to stay on top of imports.⁴⁷⁵

However, Mr Sterpin argued that overseas manufacturing plants may be set up to Australian quality assurance standards, although this will be reflected in final in product costs:

⁴⁶⁹ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.8.

⁴⁷⁰ Mr A. Van Krieken, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.10.

⁴⁷¹ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁴⁷² Mr A. Van Krieken, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.10.

⁴⁷³ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁷⁴ Mr A. Van Krieken, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.10.

⁴⁷⁵ Ms G. Harrison, Victorian Schoolwear Manager, Lowes, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, pp.20-21.

If you do not want to put any systems in place and you want to buy a cheap product, you will get it. If you put your systems in place as though you have a manufacturing plant locally, then you will get that as well...⁴⁷⁶

Mr Sterpin further noted that a decline in quality may similarly be caused by 'cowboys' in the local school uniform industry, and called for stronger requirements relating to the quality of school uniforms in general.⁴⁷⁷

Industry representatives also argued that Australian manufacturers may be better able to respond to schools' needs in terms of availability and timely delivery of school uniform items. Mr Stephen Stewart, Sales and Marketing Manager, Apparel/Yarns, Macquarie Textiles, observed that distances and delivery times make it easier for schools to source their school uniform items from Australian suppliers:

The other issue that comes into play there is the lead times. We can make fabrics in Australia in five to six weeks, as opposed to China where you are looking at, say, 60 or 70 days to make it and another 30 days to get it here. Therefore, these schools have got to be well regulated or discipline themselves to have those uniforms ready on time.⁴⁷⁸

Furthermore, Mr David Powers, Managing Director, Powers Textiles, noted that Australian manufacturers are the only ones able to respond to the small quantities of specific fabrics involved in school uniform manufacturing.⁴⁷⁹

In its written submission, the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd suggested that by choosing Australian manufacturing, schools are supporting the current diversity and distinctiveness in Victorian school uniforms:

... there is considerable risk that more and more Australian school wear producers will give in to the pressure of cheaper imports thus robbing parents and students of the variety of choice they currently have. It should be remembered that for many, if not all, schools a uniform reflects the school's culture, values and history. For many schools, the cut, colour, look and feel of the uniform is critical and an increasing move to more imported products – as evidenced in other markets – could see this ability for variation disappear as only a few large multinational companies begin producing standardised uniforms for sale into Australia.⁴⁸⁰

The Council's written and oral submissions argued that the Victorian Government should do more to encourage Victorian schools to purchase Australian made school uniforms. In particular, it recommended that action be taken to make Australian materials and manufacturing easier to recognise.⁴⁸¹ The Council also suggested that schools should perhaps be financially rewarded for prioritising school uniform products that have high levels of Australian content.⁴⁸² The Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch), the FairWear Campaign and the HomeWorkers Code of Practice Committee also recommended that Victorian school uniforms be made exclusively by Australian workers, as part of broader recommendations related to ethical manufacturing, as discussed in the following section.⁴⁸³

The Committee found that many Victorian schools would like to prioritise Australian made manufacturing. According to the Committee's survey, 17.5 per cent of Victorian schools currently set explicit standards relating to Australian made school uniform items in their uniform purchasing. The proportion of schools adopting such

⁴⁷⁶ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.5.

⁴⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.3.

⁴⁷⁸ Mr S. Stewart, Sales and Marketing Manager, Apparel/Yarns, Macquarie Textiles, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.11.

⁴⁷⁹ Mr D. Powers, Managing Director, Powers Textiles, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.11.

⁴⁸⁰ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.1.

⁴⁸² *ibid.*

⁴⁸³ Textile, Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, June 2007, p.2; FairWear Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee Inc, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

standards are similar in each sector, although Catholic schools are slightly more likely to prioritise Australian manufacturing (17.3%), compared to schools in the government (13.9%) or independent (14.9%) sectors.⁴⁸⁴

Other schools interpret local manufacturing at a narrower level. The Committee's survey found that 1.2 per cent of schools prioritise manufacturers in their local area when purchasing their school uniform items.⁴⁸⁵ This finding was supported by some schools' written submissions. Hawkesdale P-12 College, for example, described how elements of its uniform had been chosen to reflect local industry:

Hawkesdale is a rural community set in the Western District with wool as the major agricultural industry. The wool jumpers the school has selected are made locally and sell at the school at \$60-\$80. They are washable and long lasting.⁴⁸⁶

One member of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals located in a small country town noted that the school's choice to move the supply of some uniform items outside the town caused concern in the school community.⁴⁸⁷ The Committee therefore notes that for some schools, sourcing the uniform from a local supplier is an important part of the school's engagement with its local community.

On the other hand, the Committee heard concerns about the likely impact of local manufacturing on the price of school uniforms. Spartan School Supplies reported that Australian made manufacturing 'comes at a high cost',⁴⁸⁸ while Mr Anthony Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, noted that the quality standards adhered to by Australian manufacturers can increase product costs.⁴⁸⁹ Mr Johnny Hamilton, Year 10 Student, Werribee Secondary College, argued that schools and families have a right to choose the cheapest alternative:

...why worsen the already significant financial burden on families when the global market offers us a diverse range of cheaper alternatives?...While uniforms persist in being a compulsory accessory to students' education, we believe families are entitled to access cheaper alternatives from foreign suppliers.⁴⁹⁰

The Committee acknowledges the importance of local or Australian materials and manufacturing to many schools and school uniform suppliers. At the same time, the Committee notes that for other schools, the cost of school uniform items will necessarily take priority over any additional purchasing standards. The Committee therefore believes that the decision whether to choose Australian made school uniforms should remain at a school community level. It nevertheless supports the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd in recommending that information be made readily available about the origin of the materials used in school uniform garments and the location of their manufacturing, to assist those schools that wish to consider these issues in their purchasing arrangements.

Ethical and Sustainable School Uniform Products

In addition to local or Australian manufacturing, the Committee heard suggestions for further standards that schools may adopt relating to their school uniform materials or manufacturing processes. The Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd suggested that information should potentially be provided to schools regarding the 'ethical and sustainable' nature of school uniform products.⁴⁹¹ Figure 7.1 shows that a number of schools in all sectors do currently

⁴⁸⁴ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ Hawkesdale P-12 College School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁴⁸⁷ Principal, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.3.

⁴⁸⁸ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

⁴⁸⁹ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁹⁰ Mr J. Hamilton, Year 10 Student, Werribee Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.28.

⁴⁹¹ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

set standards for the procurement of their school uniform items relating to FairWear (ethical manufacturing) and sustainable or environmentally friendly manufacturing.

The Committee found that schools in the Catholic sector are most likely to have standards relating to ethical (11.1%) or sustainable (8.2%) manufacturing for their school uniform items. Schools in the government sector are the least likely to have standards, for either ethical (4.5%) or sustainable (4.2%) manufacturing. In all sectors, standards relating to ethical manufacturing are more common than those relating to materials or manufacturing that is environmentally friendly.⁴⁹²

The Committee received evidence from three organisations suggesting that standards relating to ethical manufacturing may be especially relevant to school uniforms. The Textile, Clothing, and Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch) reported that many manufacturers in the industry currently breach their legal and ethical obligations to provide workers with fair pay and conditions. The Union noted that this especially applies to the large number of home-based outworkers in the industry:

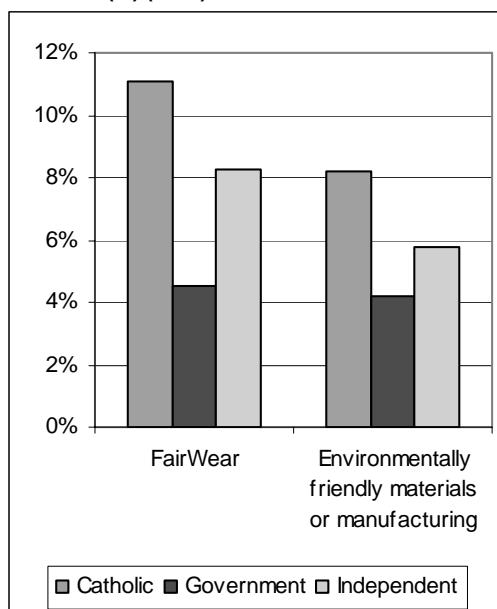
Hundreds of Victorian workers are involved in the production of materials and clothing items relating to school uniforms. Some of this work is done in reputable factories. However, much of the work is carried out through sub contracting supply chains which engage home-based outworkers who sew and construct garments from home. These workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and it has been well documented that employer obligations in relation to their pay and conditions are routinely breached.⁴⁹³

The same issue was raised by FairWear Victoria and the Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee, which are both organisations established to protect the rights of workers in the textile, clothing and footwear industry.

The above organisations called for the Victorian Government to make further provisions to promote ethical manufacturing in the textile, clothing and footwear industry. The Government currently requires all Victorian government agencies (including government schools) to adhere to the Ethical Purchasing Policy. The Policy requires that companies found to be in breach of particular industrial laws be excluded from tendering for government work for a period of time. In 2006, the Government also established a mandatory safety net for a number of industries in Victoria, including the textile, clothing and footwear industry, requiring companies tendering for government work to show that their workers receive fair pay and conditions.⁴⁹⁴

However, the Union, FairWear Victoria and the Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee suggested that the Victorian Government's current policies do not go

Figure 7.1: Victorian schools with standards for 'FairWear' and environmentally friendly school uniform manufacturing, by sector (%) (2007)



Source: Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴⁹² Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁴⁹³ Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, June 2007, p.3.

⁴⁹⁴ *ibid.*

'Schools that opt for ready made uniforms should also be advised to be aware of the Fairwear campaign, and ensure that they are manufactured by companies that do not exploit workers.'

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far enough in addressing the specific issues faced by the textile, clothing and footwear industry. Ms Michele O'Neil, State Secretary, Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union, noted that Queensland's *Code of Practice on employment and outwork obligations: textile clothing and footwear suppliers*, includes detailed, specific requirements for all companies in the industry tendering for government contracts.⁴⁹⁵ The three organisations suggested that the Victorian Government should adopt a similar standard, to address the specific concerns of the industry.

All three organisations also called for school uniforms to be procured through local suppliers accredited to the Homeworkers Code of Practice.⁴⁹⁶ The Code is a joint union and industry initiative established to provide companies with a means of demonstrating that their garments are ethically manufactured. To become accredited, companies must show that contracts at all points in their supply chain comply at least with legal requirements, and minimum standards set out in industry awards. Companies are charged an annual flat fee of \$2,200 for accreditation, which finances the administration of the Code. As at July 2007, 35 Australian companies had successfully applied for accreditation, including two school uniform manufacturers, Poppets Schoolwear and Surrey Clothing. A third school uniform manufacturer was in the process of becoming accredited.⁴⁹⁷

The Committee heard that many schools have demonstrated an interest in ethical manufacturing, through the FairWear campaign. FairWear Victoria is an organisation dedicated to promoting ethical manufacturing standards in the textile and fashion industry, coordinated by a coalition of various community organisations, and funded through grants from church and charity groups. It has also received some state government funding for specific projects, such as the Fair School Wear coordinator, employed specifically to speak to school communities about school uniform procurement.⁴⁹⁸ Ms Liz Thompson, Campaign Coordinator, FairWear Victoria, told the Committee that hundreds of schools from across Australia have submitted statements of commitment to FairWear Victoria's ethical manufacturing principles, predominantly from the secondary sector.⁴⁹⁹ Ms Thompson told the Committee that interest is often strongest from schools in low socioeconomic areas, which are most likely to have students whose parents are outworkers in the clothing, textile and footwear industry.⁵⁰⁰

While this indicates there is significant interest among schools in ethical clothing manufacture, FairWear Victoria suggested that fewer schools translate their commitment into standards for their uniform manufacturers. Ms Thompson indicated that this is because many schools are not confident in discussing issues such as workers' pay and conditions with their suppliers:

...the process of having school councils interrogating their uniform suppliers about their supply chain was something that turned out to be incredibly difficult for school communities, despite the high level of commitment...There would be phone calls they would have with their suppliers, who would say, 'Of course we pay all our workers properly'. They would say, 'Oh, okay'. That was where the conversation ended...⁵⁰¹

Ms Thompson suggested that while the Homeworkers Code of Practice is an appropriate 'interim measure', a code of practice similar to the Queensland model would assist schools to more readily assess the practices of their uniform

⁴⁹⁵ Ms M. O'Neil, State Secretary, Textile, Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch), Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.12.

⁴⁹⁶ Textile, Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch), Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; FairWear Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee Inc, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁴⁹⁷ Mr T. Clarke, Project Officer, Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee Inc, Correspondence to the Education and Training Committee, 13 July 2007.

⁴⁹⁸ Ms L. Thompson, Campaign Coordinator, FairWear Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.34.

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*, p.35.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.34.

manufacturers.⁵⁰² FairWear Victoria's written submission also noted that the transition to ethically-manufactured uniforms is likely to incur some costs for schools, and suggested that the Victorian Government support schools with subsidies and transitional funding.⁵⁰³

The Committee notes that the exploitative practices described by the above organisations are prohibited by Australian labour laws and therefore believes that further recommendations in this area are not currently required. However, the Committee notes the submissions received on this issue, and recognises that ethical manufacturing may be an important consideration for some schools in the procurement of their uniforms. The Committee recommends that schools with an interest in such matters may benefit from accessing the information resources provided for schools by the Fair School Wear Campaign, to assist them in addressing ethical uniform manufacturing with their communities and school uniform suppliers.⁵⁰⁴

Purchasing Arrangements

In addition to standards relating to the origin and construction of their school uniform items, the Committee notes that schools must give consideration to a wide range of complex business issues when making arrangements for school uniform procurement. Some of the most complex decisions that schools will need to consider include specifications for the quality of garments; reliability and continuity of supply; the ability of manufacturers to meet the required delivery schedules; and various customer service aspects, such as the level of information provided by manufacturers and suppliers, and returns policies for faulty stock.

However, evidence to this inquiry suggests that many schools are not skilled in making such decisions. Spartan School Supplies noted that the parents, volunteers or school staff responsible for school uniform supply arrangements may not have adequate knowledge of the clothing industry to select the best quality options:

The down side...is that it is common that the choices made are down to an individual whose knowledge as to what really is a quality garment is lacking. The school is therefore on a constant roller coaster of supply as the staff changes and decisions alter...⁵⁰⁵

Dr Graham Barrington, Director, C E Wise Pty Ltd, agreed that some school uniform procurement arrangements are made by staff who do not have the necessary skills to make sound business decisions:

If school councils are going to be given a direct role in deciding about supply arrangements, then they really need to be skilled and appropriately trained in how to manage those types of business relationships and be guided in the way in which tenders are run and be guided in terms of the changes that are made to uniforms—how that is done and what consultation is necessary to see that that is done in a fair way.⁵⁰⁶

Dr Barrington explained that suppliers can experience significant losses where schools do not consider their decisions carefully:

What occurs, and what we have been exposed to, are changes which are made by schools where maybe a council or a school uniform operator makes a decision without consultation with the supplier to change the uniform or change the supplier, from one supplier to another, and one can potentially be left with 500 metres of material relevant to that school only, and there are significant losses associated with that.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰² *ibid.*, p.35.

⁵⁰³ FairWear Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007 p.1.

⁵⁰⁴ More information is available on the FairWear Campaign website, <<http://www.fairwear.org.au/engine.php>>.

⁵⁰⁵ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵⁰⁶ Dr G. Barrington, Director, C.E. Wise Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.24.

⁵⁰⁷ *ibid.*, p.25.

As outlined in the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd's written submission, current school uniform purchasing arrangements are also of broader concern throughout the industry.⁵⁰⁸

The Committee notes that government schools are required to adhere to certain standards in their purchasing arrangements for school uniform items. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines advise schools to ensure that their arrangements with school uniform suppliers are compliant with the Commonwealth *Trade Practices Act 1974* and the Victorian *Fair Trading Act 1999*. The Department notes that the requirements made under these Acts impose certain obligations upon schools in their commercial arrangements; for example, giving manufacturers an accurate representation of the number of students in the school, or entering into licensing agreements with their uniform suppliers.⁵⁰⁹

According to the Department, one of the ways in which schools should minimise the risk of breaching relevant legislation is to source their uniforms from multiple suppliers:

Exclusive agreements can breach the *Trade Practices Act 1974* and it is therefore wiser for school councils to have a panel of suppliers from which students/parents/guardians may choose freely rather than a particular supplier only.⁵¹⁰

Despite this advice, a number of schools indicated in written submissions that they source their uniform items from a single supplier. Such schools argue that an exclusive arrangement provides an opportunity to establish effective relationships with local suppliers, and to negotiate favourable terms and prices.⁵¹¹ PSW Pty Ltd indicated that a sole supplier arrangement reduces costs through economies of scale, with larger orders giving schools greater leverage in price negotiations:

Where school councils have contracted with multiple suppliers, the reduction in scale (ie number of potential for sales) has led to a lower product quality (through compromising of technical specifications) and upward pressure on prices. In this case, the concept of increased competition doesn't provide the consumer and end-user (parents, students) with an advantage.⁵¹²

PSW Pty Ltd, a major school uniform supplier for Victorian schools, reported that it would rarely enter into an agreement with a school where it is not the sole supplier.⁵¹³

However, the use of sole suppliers attracted criticism from other contributors to the inquiry. School uniform manufacturer Beleza Pty Ltd argued that the use of a sole supplier eliminates competition and increases costs to students and their families:

Under standard practice, many schools appoint a sole official school uniform supplier. This exclusive licensing arrangement has devastating ramifications on the pricing structure for students and parents. Effectively, their consumer right to seek alternate competition for their purchase is removed.⁵¹⁴

Beleza Pty Ltd called for an end to exclusive school uniform supply arrangements in the interests of Victorian families, particularly those in lower socioeconomic communities:

I would recommend that families are not denied this important financial benefit, simply for the gain of an exclusive supplier. Exclusive licensing arrangements present no incentive for the official school supplier to offer any cost-saving benefits or reduced prices to students and their families. Crudely, each school uniform supplier has a monopoly over the schools by which they have exclusive licensing arrangements. I urge

⁵⁰⁸ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁰⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹¹ For example, Wangaratta High School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵¹² PSW Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.11.

⁵¹³ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ Beleza Pty Ltd, Written Submission, July 2007, p.1.

for the consideration by the State Education Department to overhaul such archaic practices to increase market competition for the benefit of students and their families.⁵¹⁵

Concerns regarding sole supplier arrangements also came from within school communities. A written submission from Hampton Park Primary School supported the view that a single school uniform supplier will increase costs due to lack of competition:

The difficulty of being locked into an exclusive contract with a particular company... is that there is no competition for business, and prices are often higher from the contracted company than those offered by other companies as a result.⁵¹⁶

Some parents also made submissions outlining their belief that schools have an obligation to provide parents with a choice.⁵¹⁷ Parents Victoria's written submission suggests that similar opinions are shared among other parents of children in Victorian government schools.⁵¹⁸

Where schools do choose to enter into an exclusive agreement with a supplier, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development offers a number of further suggestions to minimise the risk of legal liability. These include limiting the period of the agreement to no more than three years; and using a tender process at the end of such a period to promote competition from other suppliers.⁵¹⁹

Some schools noted in their written submissions that they went through a rigorous tendering process in selecting a supplier for their uniform.⁵²⁰ While cost is a major consideration, various submissions outlined other factors, such as quality and accessibility of uniform items, which should also be considered by schools when selecting a school uniform supplier. For example:

The uniform subcommittee spent a considerable amount of time tendering for a uniform supplier. Cost of uniform articles was a major factor for this subcommittee. While understanding that cheaper is not always better, the cost of specific articles, quality of clothing and quality control of the supplier and the length of time the uniform is worn were all considered. Our current uniform supplier is available on a weekly basis on the school site, orders can also be placed at the school office and online ordering has become available, therefore providing many convenient opportunities for families to purchase.⁵²¹

The above evidence clearly demonstrates the complexity of the issues that schools need to consider, in identifying the school uniform purchasing arrangements that will provide the best deal to their communities.

Given the complex legal and commercial issues surrounding purchasing arrangements for school uniform items, some participants in the inquiry suggested that procurement should be centralised, either on a regional or statewide basis. The Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd noted that this approach has been successful for other areas of government procurement:

An alternative option to guidelines would be for the supply of school uniforms to be tendered to one or several groups, possibly on a regional basis, who would be responsible for the efficient operation of the entire system. This model has been followed by other government departments including defense, and has produced significant efficiencies in respect of ordering and purchasing.⁵²²

In a written submission, one parent suggested that a statewide school uniform procurement strategy would be most cost-effective for Victorian families.⁵²³

⁵¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ Hampton Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵¹⁷ Ms S. Harriage, Parent, Written Submission, July 2007, p.1; Ms K. Rolands, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁵¹⁸ Parents Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.3.

⁵¹⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁵²⁰ Eumemmerring College Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Carrum Downs Primary School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵²¹ Carrum Downs Primary School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, pp.1-2.

⁵²² Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, June 2007, p.4.

⁵²³ Ms M. A. Rosenthal, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

However, the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals voiced its opposition to such a proposal:

VASSP strongly believes that procurement policies should be up to each school council and that there should not be a form of statewide procurement.⁵²⁴

The Committee recognises that for many school communities, it is important that their school uniform design remains distinctive. Given such diversity in the needs and preferences of Victorian schools, the Committee believes that a statewide model of procurement would not be the most feasible or desirable approach. However, the Committee notes that procurement of some school uniform items on a regional or cluster basis may be beneficial for some schools.

The Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd recommended to the Committee that governments and industry should work together to develop education resources on school uniforms and proper purchasing guidelines.⁵²⁵ Eumemmerring College Council, one of the schools that indicated it had undertaken an extensive tendering process, supported this recommendation, noting that improved guidelines on tender processes for school uniforms would be beneficial for schools.⁵²⁶ The Committee also endorses these suggestions and recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development work with schools and industry to improve the resources available to assist schools in making effective purchasing arrangements for school uniform items.

Recommendation 7.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with schools and industry representatives, assess the resources currently available to assist schools in their school uniform procurement arrangements, and publish additional guidelines as necessary.

School Uniform Shops

As well as making purchasing arrangements, schools with uniforms must also determine the most cost-effective method for distributing their uniform items to students and families. Written submissions from Spartan School Supplies, PSW Pty Ltd and Noone Imagewear outlined the various models that school uniform shops may follow. The Committee found that a 'very common set-up' is a school uniform shop located within the school and run by the school support network, typically staffed by volunteers or low-paid staff.⁵²⁷ Such shops typically operate with the goal of providing school uniforms to parents at the cheapest possible price, placing a very small profit margin on their products:

Many schools want to have a school uniform and want to offer it to the parents at the cheapest price possible. These schools place a very small profit margin on their goods and concentrate upon the service to the school community as their primary focus.⁵²⁸

This community service ethic was supported in written submissions received from schools that have adopted this model.⁵²⁹ Other schools operate more businesslike on-site uniform shops, involving at least one paid staff member, often supported by volunteers. Spartan School Supplies noted that the profit margin in such shops is likely to vary, but if run well, these shops can be a valuable source of additional revenue.⁵³⁰

The Committee's survey found that 30.8 per cent of Victorian schools have an on-site school uniform shop run by the school. In addition, 29.2 per cent of schools

⁵²⁴ Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.3.

⁵²⁵ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁵²⁶ Eumemmerring College Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁵²⁷ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵²⁸ *ibid.*

⁵²⁹ For example, Strathmore North Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Eltham East Primary School Council, Written Submission, August 2007, p.1.

⁵³⁰ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

offer uniform items for purchase through the school office, either as the sole retail outlet or in combination with others. A total of 31.5 per cent of schools overall make their uniform items available for purchase exclusively through the school, either through the office, an on-site uniform shop run by the school, or a combination of both.⁵³¹ This makes school distribution the most common exclusive outlet for school uniform sales.

Noone Imagewear argued that the purported benefits of a school-run uniform shop are often not supported by fact. Instead, the company noted that the shop can be a financial burden for the school, tying up valuable funds in unused uniform stock:

It is common for secondary colleges to hold from \$60,000 to \$100,000 [of stock] at any time of year. From a financial point of view, it must be asked whether these funds should be spent in providing better education facilities within the school, especially when the parents are not deriving any real cost savings and most schools make little or no profits from their retail endeavours.⁵³²

Hampton Park Primary School's written submission supported the view that stock holding and ordering can create financial difficulties:

Where uniform shops have been run and stocked by parent groups (PFA etc) the school is often financially disadvantaged as money is tied up in stock and often a minimum number of a particular item is required to be ordered from stockists which causes problems when only 1 or 2 of a particular size item are required.⁵³³

A number of school uniform manufacturers attributed the inefficiencies in school-run uniform shops to poor management.⁵³⁴ Evidence suggests that such shops typically do not deliver on their perceived cost-saving potential because of inefficient management of uniform stock:

There has been a widely held view, that this is the most cost efficient method of uniform distribution especially when there are minimal overhead costs to provide this option. However their inefficiencies in supply and stock management are prevalent in nearly all schools who provide this method of supply.⁵³⁵

Concerns about knowledge of the industry among volunteer shop staff were also put forward by the Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd:

There were problems in the sense that they are voluntary, so there are often issues around stock ordering and having the right uniforms on hand. There was also how well people had the ability to actually sell the garments and talk about their construction, what they are made of and the way to care for them.⁵³⁶

The Committee notes that negotiating business arrangements may require skills and resources that many schools may not have readily at their disposal, especially small schools or those from disadvantaged communities.

The vast array of choices in the supply of school uniforms and the problems associated with their distribution are now prompting many schools to outsource the management of their school uniform shops to third-party suppliers. Written submissions from school uniform manufacturers noted that there has been a growing trend over the last five years for schools to engage a single contracted supplier to run a uniform shop on the school grounds.⁵³⁷ The Committee's survey found that 16.3 per cent of schools have taken up this option, including schools from all three sectors, and across metropolitan and regional areas. The

⁵³¹ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵³² Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵³³ Hampton Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵³⁴ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2; Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵³⁵ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

⁵³⁶ Mr A. Van Krieken, Executive Director, Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.11.

⁵³⁷ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3; Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

'Schools will always tend to get the best arrangement they can for parents, because they do not want to price themselves out of it. The last thing we want is parents saying, 'We can't afford this. It's not reasonable'.'

Stephen Franzi-Ford,
Chief Executive Officer,
Association of School
Councils in Victoria

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contractor's on-site shop was the only outlet available for the purchase of new uniforms in 8.7 per cent of schools overall.⁵³⁸

The Committee heard that a significant benefit of an on-site retail outlet run by an external contractor is the removal of the financial risk to schools involved in holding large amounts of stock.⁵³⁹ Other purported benefits include more professional management and service, and ease of access for parents and students through more convenient opening hours.⁵⁴⁰ Noone Imagewear demonstrated through a case study of two comparable schools that parents at a school that runs its own uniform shop are 'significantly worse off' in terms of cost and service than parents at a school served by an external contractor.⁵⁴¹

Noone Imagewear also argued that this method is most cost-effective if the middle link in the supply chain is removed, and the contractor running the shop is also the manufacturer or importer of the uniform.⁵⁴² However, Spartan School Supplies expressed concern that contracting importers or manufacturers to run the school uniform shop compromises the school's control over the supply process, as the contractor may prioritise their own profit margins over product quality:

The uniform is usually chosen by the school but there is varying power for the operator to source as best they can to meet the needs of the school. This option will slowly allow a handful of suppliers to gain control of the market. Once an operator gains control of the Uniform Shop they obviously gain control of the supply chain and no longer can the best product win. The supply now comes down to the best product the operator can source to meet their own needs, which is obviously strongly linked to profit.⁵⁴³

Spartan School Supplies went on to argue that the provision of a school uniform shop management service is now a matter of survival for companies in the school uniform industry:

To fail to recognise the need for the supply of uniform management services would be like sticking our heads in the sand...The national trend, which is slow but sure, is in outsourcing the school shop to an independent operator. Spartan has now joined this trend and offers this service, however this is through necessity rather than desire. There are many players all needing to protect ourselves for the future.⁵⁴⁴

Spartan School Supplies called for a review of the processes by which schools have input into the selection of their uniform items, where management of the school uniform shop is contracted to a single supplier.⁵⁴⁵

An alternative retail model involves the school making school uniform items available through an off-site retail outlet. According to the Committee's survey, this is the option most commonly available to school communities, offered by 44.5 per cent of Victorian schools.⁵⁴⁶ However, Spartan School Supplies suggested that the realities of the retail industry make this the least competitive distribution model:

This is where parents are generally (in my opinion) paying a high price for average quality. However, the store must make a return on floor space, credit card fees, stock holding, staff and seasonal buying patterns – again a commercial reality.⁵⁴⁷

⁵³⁸ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵³⁹ Hampton Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Written Submission, April 2007, p.3; PSW Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.10.

⁵⁴⁰ For example, Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3; Melton Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁴¹ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2 & 5-6.

⁵⁴² *ibid.*, p.3.

⁵⁴³ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*, pp.3-4.

⁵⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.4.

⁵⁴⁶ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁴⁷ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

On the other hand, Noone Imagewear's written submission argued that an off-site retail outlet is not necessarily less competitive, as many school uniform retailers now have direct links with manufacturers:

There has been a perception that this method can be more expensive, given the overheads to run a full retail facility. However there are now a number of retailers who also have their own manufacturing/importing chains of supply.⁵⁴⁸

For many schools, the most cost-effective distribution arrangement is simply to select uniforms that are available from local department stores. The Committee found that 13.8 per cent of schools have uniforms available from major department stores, most with higher proportions of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.⁵⁴⁹ This arrangement can keep prices down by enabling families to access low-cost, generic garments, and to benefit from competition between major retailers. Southern Autistic School noted in its written submission that it has even negotiated for its students to receive 'a small discount' when purchasing school uniform items from local department stores.⁵⁵⁰

The Committee notes that department stores may be an attractive option for schools that wish to access some of the benefits of a student uniform, without the associated burden of arranging its procurement and distribution. However, Mr Anthony Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, remarked that cheap, generic garments can compromise the standards that many schools seek to achieve in their uniform policies:

When buying from the cheaper sources you no longer have uniformity or consistency within a school and it defeats the purpose of having uniforms in the first place.⁵⁵¹

The Committee acknowledges that a desire for consistency is the reason that many schools prefer a single outlet for the supply and distribution of their school uniform.

The Committee recognises that no single distribution is likely to serve the needs of all Victorian schools. PSW Pty Ltd explained that all school uniform procurement and distribution options are subject to risks, and that the selection of an appropriate model should be left to school communities:

The best option is for the school to determine based upon their staff, uniform policy and commitment to the uniform and its supply...There are, however, inherent inefficiencies in each model...Each model has the potential to create tension between schools and suppliers that, if not resolved, may lead to sub-optimal outcomes for the school community.⁵⁵²

The Committee nevertheless believes that these risks can be mitigated through improved departmental guidelines aimed at improving quality and consistency in the management of uniform shops for Victorian schools.

The Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd included in its written submission a recommendation that stronger guidelines be developed, in conjunction with industry and schools, for the management of school uniform shops. The Council suggested that such guidelines should include requirements relating to areas such as:

- standardised ordering forms and processes;
- appropriate inventory controls and monitoring, relevant to the size of the school;
- appropriate training for employees or volunteers operating the uniform shop;
- nominating a single contact officer for liaison with uniform suppliers; and

⁵⁴⁸ Noone Imagewear, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵⁴⁹ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁵⁰ Southern Autistic School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁵¹ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, p.3.

⁵⁵² PSW Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.11.

'We see education for schools with regard to the choices available to them and information relevant to setting up and running a uniform shop themselves as a valuable set of tools to assist them to navigate through the choices of uniform supply. Commonly schools fly blind.'

Spartan School Supplies

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- placing orders with consideration to production and delivery times.⁵⁵³

The Council noted that while these guidelines may appear complex, similar guidelines are in place for other voluntary bodies, including school canteen staff and other community groups, and are readily understood and implemented by volunteer staff.⁵⁵⁴ It also argued that such guidelines may also be useful for other types of school uniform outlets, not only those run by volunteers.⁵⁵⁵

The Committee supports the Council's suggestions and recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provide further information to schools to assist them in the distribution of their school uniform items. Given the current prevalence of school-run models of uniform distribution in Victoria, the Committee recommends that this advice include detailed information about the management of a school uniform shop for school administrators, parents and other volunteers. The Committee also recommends that the Department provide some advice regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative distribution models available to schools, to assist schools in making informed decisions about school uniform distribution arrangements.

Recommendation 7.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in consultation with relevant industry representatives, publish improved guidelines regarding distribution models for school uniform items, including detailed advice regarding the management of school uniform shops.

Profits on School Uniform Sales

The Committee notes that the various models for the distribution of school uniforms described above provide schools with the opportunity to make a profit on the sale of their uniform items. In Victoria, the profits schools may make on the sale of school uniform items are subject to certain legal obligations. For non-government schools, legal requirements necessitate only that any revenue on school uniform sales is returned to the school, as outlined by Mr Andrew Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria:

...all schools, in order to operate in Victoria, have to be not-for-profit entities and therefore any surplus that comes through from the uniform shop would be by law directed back into the operations of the school...It certainly cannot be distributed to any other entity.⁵⁵⁶

For schools in the government sector, however, the Committee found evidence to suggest that the issues around profits on school uniform sales may be more complex.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines on dress codes and school uniforms do not currently specify whether government schools may make a profit on uniform sales. However, in a 2007 policy statement, *Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools*, the Department clarifies the kinds of costs that government schools can impose on parents and carers.⁵⁵⁷ Section 3 of the statement permits schools to request payments from parents for 'essential education items' that parents are required to provide, including stationery, text books and school uniforms, where applicable. In section 4, the Department clearly states that schools should not charge for such items above what is necessary to ensure that no loss is incurred:

⁵⁵³ Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd, Written Submission, June 2007, p.4.

⁵⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ Mr A. Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.34.

⁵⁵⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, *Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools*, Office for Government School Education, DEECD, Melbourne, p.4.

The school-level policy [on essential education items] must keep parent payments to a minimum and must not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services to the student.⁵⁵⁸

The Committee therefore believes that government schools making profits on the sale of school uniforms may run contrary to their obligation to keep school uniform prices to a minimum.

The Victorian *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* also makes provisions relating to parent payments to government schools. The Act prohibits government schools from charging fees, but allows schools to request contributions from parents and carers, as long as they are voluntary. In requesting a contribution, schools must clearly explain what it will be used for, and ensure that it is obtained 'without coercion or harassment'.⁵⁵⁹ The Committee believes that this places a particular obligation on government schools in which school uniforms are compulsory, to ensure that they are not inadvertently collecting unauthorised contributions from families through profits on uniform sales.

Mr Stephen Franzi-Ford, Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, reported that he knows of no school that makes substantial money out of selling new clothes.⁵⁶⁰ The Committee found some examples to support this observation. Ranfurly Primary School, for instance, emphasised that its school-based uniform shop is not used to raise funds for the school:

Our uniform sales are conducted by volunteer parents and the uniform shop is not run as a profit-making venture.⁵⁶¹

Orchard Grove Primary School is another example, explicitly stating in its school uniform policy that profits will be kept to a minimum:

Sales of uniforms will operate as a service to parents and minimum 'mark up' on cost prices will be added.⁵⁶²

The Committee nevertheless also found that some Victorian schools do make profits on the sales of their school uniform. Uniform supplier PSW Pty Ltd reported that 'the majority of schools top-up their pricing by 50c to a dollar',⁵⁶³ with 'substantial variation on the profit margin charged by schools, based on their location and demographic make up'.⁵⁶⁴ A profit and loss statement for a school-run uniform shop in one government secondary school indicated that the school returned a profit of 32.6 per cent on uniform sales in 2005.⁵⁶⁵ Retailers that sell school uniform items on a school's behalf also typically pay a yearly commission on sales back to the school, ranging between 3 and 20 percent.⁵⁶⁶

The Committee recognises that profit on school uniform sales in government schools is a complex issue. It could be argued, for example, that it is of greater benefit to students for such profits to be made by schools, rather than by commercial retailers. Mr Joel Fisk, Year 12 Student, Werribee Secondary College, put forward this view in a public hearing, with the proviso that school uniform prices should not be over-inflated:

⁵⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁵⁹ Section 2.2.7, *Education Reform Act 2006* (Victoria).

⁵⁶⁰ Mr S. Franzi-Ford, Chief Executive Officer, Association of School Councils in Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.14.

⁵⁶¹ Ranfurly Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁵⁶² Orchard Grove Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

⁵⁶³ Mr A. Sterpin, Managing Director, PSW Pty Ltd, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 25 June 2007, pp.5-6.

⁵⁶⁴ PSW Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.10.

⁵⁶⁵ Whittlesea Secondary College, Uniform Shop, Profit and Loss Statement for the period 01/01/2005–31/12/2005. Copy supplied by Ms B. Johns, Written Submission, May 2007, p.15.

⁵⁶⁶ Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.2.

'Schools should not be able to profit from the sale of uniforms, as they are already expensive. Individual schools have the responsibility not only to educate students but also to make school inexpensive and accessible.'

Catrina Forrester, Year 10 Student, Shepparton High School

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For the reason that it will benefit students, we believe that fundraising from profits from the sale of uniforms should be allowed, provided that prices are reasonable.⁵⁶⁷

Mr Jaan Butler, Year 12 Student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, told the Committee that the sale of optional school uniform items was a particularly effective fundraiser for his school:

Despite the fact that our school, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, does not have a uniform, our student council sells merchandise in the form of drink bottles, caps and that sort of thing, including a number of uniform items such as hoodies, jumpers and shirts. These are incredibly popular — we sell hundreds every year — and they are a mainstay of our student council's budget. We use the money to run various events at lunchtimes, socials, trivia nights and to make donations. We believe that if we are stopped from selling these items, it will be a restriction on the activities of our student council, which will ultimately be of no benefit to our students.⁵⁶⁸

On the other hand, the Committee heard the view that the addition of a profit margin to sales of compulsory uniform items places an unnecessary burden on parents and families, especially those in financial hardship. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc recommended that schools be required to sell uniforms on a non-profit making basis, in the interests of low-income families.⁵⁶⁹ As noted Chapter 6, other organisations that support low-income families also indicated that many are currently struggling to meet school uniform costs.⁵⁷⁰ The Committee notes that keeping profit margins to a minimum is one way in which schools can help ensure school uniforms are accessible to families in financial difficulty.

The Committee notes that the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families' recently revised guidelines interpret the sale of school uniform items through a school as an opportunity for the school to keep costs down, not to make additional revenue. The Department strongly advises schools not to use the exclusive supply of their uniform as a profit-making activity:

...schools can use their own purchasing power to buy in bulk and pass on savings to parents. Governing bodies **should not** seek to operate as sole suppliers in order to raise additional funds through the sale of new school uniforms.⁵⁷¹

The Committee is concerned at the apparent discrepancy between current policy and legislation in Victoria, and school uniform pricing structures in some Victorian government schools. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development investigate the issues around profit on uniform sales in greater depth, and publish a clear statement on its position. Regardless of the Department's findings, the Committee also believes that a high level of transparency is necessary in the sale of school uniform items by schools in the government sector. This may mean, for example, that profit and loss statements should be made available to members of the school community, through operating statements or annual reports.

Recommendation 7.3: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish guidelines stating its position on profit margins on the sale of school uniform items by government schools.

Recommendation 7.4: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development require schools to publish profit and loss statements relating to the sales of school uniform items in their annual financial reporting.

⁵⁶⁷ Mr J. Fisk, Year 12 Student, Werribee Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.29.

⁵⁶⁸ Mr J. Butler, Year 12 Student, Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.29.

⁵⁶⁹ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Written Submission, May 2007, p.5.

⁵⁷⁰ The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division, Written Submission April 2007, p.1; Mr L. Twentyman, Outreach Worker, Open Family Australia, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.30.

⁵⁷¹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (United Kingdom) 2007, *DCSF Guidance to Schools on School Uniform and Related Policies*, DCSF, London.

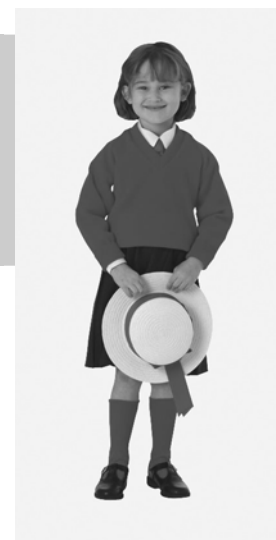
Conclusion

As demonstrated above, purchasing and distribution decisions around school uniforms can be complex, and involve knowledge or skills that are not always readily available in an educational environment. Purchasing and distribution arrangements can also have significant implications for the costs of school uniforms for students and their families. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development increase the level of support available to schools to help them in these decisions, and ensure that they can provide the best possible deal on school uniforms for their communities.

The Committee also notes that schools are sometimes called on to make complex decisions relating to uniform pricing. In purchasing uniform items from suppliers, schools are called on to negotiate in the interests of the school community, as eventual consumers of school uniform items. At the same time, the Committee found that the distribution of school uniform items presents an opportunity to raise additional revenue from members of the community, for the benefit of the school. The Committee believes that greater clarity from the Department regarding the profits that may be made on school uniform sales will help ensure that schools can manage these arrangements effectively and equitably.

Chapter 8:

Consultation and Review



Introduction

In a world where we are encouraging global citizens to work together, we should start off within small communities, and that includes schools, being a community in itself.⁵⁷²

As previously discussed, the Committee supports the right of school communities to develop dress codes and school uniform policies for themselves. However, the Committee also notes that this right is accompanied by a responsibility for schools to undertake broad and meaningful community consultation, and ensure that their dress code or uniform policy reflects the views of the school community as closely as possible. This chapter discusses effective processes for the development and review of dress codes and school uniform policies in consultation with school communities, and the Committee's recommendations regarding how these processes may be strengthened. It also addresses appropriate responses for schools to employ when their dress codes and school uniform policies are challenged by members of their school communities.

Reviewing Dress Codes and School Uniform Policies

Like other school policies, dress codes and school uniform policies should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain responsive to their communities' needs. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development recommends that schools should provide for their dress codes and school uniform policies to be reviewed as the need arises:

It is advised that a dress code provides for review and amendment, if necessary, to reflect emerging safety issues or significant changes within the school community.⁵⁷³

The Committee heard of a range of circumstances in which changes in school communities might initiate a review of a dress code or school uniform policy. Merrilands P-12 College provided an example of how a school uniform can change with shifting demographics:

In recent years our school has seen an increase in the number of Muslim students and our school uniform was added to in order to meet their cultural requirements.⁵⁷⁴

Galvin Park Secondary College described how changes to the school uniform may be instigated by broader changes in the culture of the school:

The College is undertaking and achieving renewal of curriculum; and, in relation to the present inquiry, renewal and re-imaging itself through a more contemporary, more adult and more flexible dress code.⁵⁷⁵

A comment in the Committee's survey indicated that reviews may also be triggered by commercial considerations, such as changes in the availability of school uniform items or materials:

[Reviews occur] usually when manufacturers no longer [supply] our choice of material eg Fletcher Jones went out of business and we lost our lovely kilt material.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷² Mr J. Centeno, Year 10 Student, Balwyn High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.33.

⁵⁷³ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁵⁷⁴ Merrilands College School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁵⁷⁵ Galvin Park Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

Eltham High School noted that even a school which does not have a uniform must regularly review its dress code to reflect changing priorities and circumstances:

This process should be a dynamic one, with the incorporation of new elements as appropriate, ie the relatively recent understanding of the need for 'Sun smart' dress, clarification on appropriate styles etc.⁵⁷⁷

The Committee heard that both students and parents may pursue a change or review to a dress code or school uniform policy:

...as the time has passed...uniform policies and dress codes have needed redeveloping. As it is usually the students who actually want the change brought about, they should be the ones who notify the school council uniform subcommittee, to initiate a change, via a member of the school representative council.⁵⁷⁸

The school council reviews uniform policy as needed. This is often in response to requests from parents or children to add a new item or style to the range of uniform items.⁵⁷⁹

The Committee believes it is important for schools to publicise the processes that members of the school community may follow to request changes to the dress code or uniform policy. This will ensure that all suggestions may be heard, and responded to appropriately.

The Committee is nevertheless concerned that 'needs-based' reviews of a dress code or school uniform policy alone may not be sufficient to keep the policy up-to-date. For example, Taylors Lakes Secondary College told the Committee that its school uniform policy was not officially reviewed for 12 years. In this time, many variations were 'unofficially introduced', frustrating the staff charged with enforcing the policy, and confusing the students and parents seeking to comply.⁵⁸⁰ Several of the disputes over school uniforms brought to the Committee's attention resulted from such 'unofficial' changes, where students wore a non-compliant item for some time before the policy was enforced.⁵⁸¹

At the same time, the Committee is mindful of the workload that may be placed on schools and their communities if a dress code or uniform policy is reviewed too frequently. Mr John Edney, Year 11 Student, Templestowe College, remarked on the complex implications of school uniform policy reviews:

It was not until we began our investigations for today's hearing that we began to understand the complexities of the purpose of the uniform, and the stringent processes required to change the uniform. This ranges from the cost of changing the uniform, to the school and to the parents, and to the binding contracts with the uniform manufacturers, not to mention the fact that many schools have been associated with particular colours and recognised for these colours.⁵⁸²

The Committee notes that overly frequent reviews of a dress code or school uniform policy may create an undue administrative burden, especially if the school adheres to rigorous community consultation processes as recommended throughout this chapter.

Any review of a dress code or uniform policy must also take into account the expense involved for the school community. Mr Anton Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, noted that frequent or sudden changes in

⁵⁷⁶ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁷⁷ Eltham High School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁵⁷⁸ Ms E. Forte, Year 12 Student, Lowanna College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.32.

⁵⁷⁹ Marlo Primary School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁸⁰ Taylors Lakes Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁸¹ For example, J. Metlikovec, 'Banned for \$15 pants', *Herald Sun*, 8 June 2007, p.31; Mr T. Marsh, Parent, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁸² Mr J. Edney, Year 11 Student, Templestowe College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.32.

uniform policies are of particular concern to families in financial difficulty.⁵⁸³ One school in the Committee's survey noted that the expense to families is a reason for the school to minimise substantial changes to its uniform policy:

Uniform review is kept to a minimum because of the expense involved and small changes are made from time to time rather than drastic moves.⁵⁸⁴

The Committee notes that in South Australia, departmental guidelines for schools recommend that 'any change in dress code should only be implemented after a formal notification period of 6 months and preferably a period closer to 12 months'.⁵⁸⁵ The Committee supports such a recommendation for Victorian schools.

The Committee found that the NSW Department of Education and Training provides specific guidance about an appropriate review cycle for dress codes and school uniform policies:

The school's uniform policy and school uniform requirements should be reviewed at least every five years and amended where necessary. Groups within the school community may also seek a review when circumstances change significantly or issues arise.⁵⁸⁶

The Committee's survey found that while a majority of Victorian schools (62.9%) have a variable cycle for reviewing their dress code or uniform policy, a significant number of schools (28.1%) follow a fixed review cycle. The most common length of the cycle is on an annual basis (23.2%), but a number of schools also reported two, three, four or five-yearly reviews.⁵⁸⁷ The Committee notes that certain elements of dress codes and school uniform policies may be reviewed more or less often than the rest of the policy. For example, the SunSmart Program recommends that elements of a dress code or school uniform policy relating to sun protection should be reviewed every three years.⁵⁸⁸

The Committee agrees that reviews of dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools should remain flexible enough to accommodate any significant emerging needs or concerns. The Committee nevertheless notes that formal reviews are an important way of maintaining consistency and clarity in school uniform policies, and encourages schools to establish a regular review cycle. In the Committee's view, dress codes and school uniform policies should be reviewed every three to five years, to enable schools to invest sufficient time in undertaking appropriate consultation. The Committee also notes that the review of a dress code or school uniform policy should not necessarily seek to make changes to the policy, as such changes may impose costs or inconvenience for the school community. Instead, the review may simply serve as an opportunity to re-affirm the school's commitment to an existing policy, and resolve any inconsistencies that may have arisen between reviews.

Recommendation 8.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advise schools to review their dress codes and school uniform policies every three to five years in consultation with their communities, addressing all the issues covered in departmental guidelines.

⁵⁸³ Mr A. Leschen, Regional Programs Manager, The Smith Family, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.5.

⁵⁸⁴ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁸⁵ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) 2007, *Administrative Instructions and Guidelines*, May 2007, DECS, Adelaide, p.108.

⁵⁸⁶ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniform Policy*, Policy PD/2004/0025/V001, August 2004, DET, Sydney.

⁵⁸⁷ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁵⁸⁸ SunSmart Program, 'Review your school's SunSmart policy', SunSmart website, <<http://www.sunsmart.com.au/browse.asp?ContainerID=1546>>, accessed on 30 October 2007.

'Parent opinion of uniform policy and its implementation is very positive. They value the efforts of the school in providing clear and consistent guidelines that support all students.'

Tallangatta Secondary College School Council

The Importance of Community Engagement

The Committee notes that the School Council is the elected authority charged by law with representing community views in the administration of a school. This entitles councils to act on behalf of their communities in matters related to the development and review of dress codes and school uniform policies. As stated by school uniform manufacturer PSW Pty Ltd:

Ultimately School Councils reflect the values and beliefs of the school community and stakeholders, having been elected democratically by those same stakeholders.⁵⁸⁹

Nevertheless, in setting out the roles and responsibilities of school councils, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development notes that there are some issues on which school councils should consult more directly with its community, including dress codes and school uniforms:

On some matters council is required to seek community opinion, eg dress code and the school charter...⁵⁹⁰

The Department goes on to explain that with respect to such issues, the Council's mandate to represent community views is not sufficient, but that further consultation is required:

While the elected members of the school council are elected by separate electorates (parents elect parent members, DEET employees elect DEET employee members) they are nevertheless responsible to the total school community. Members therefore have a moral obligation, apart from any legal obligation, to consult with the school community and occasionally beyond the school community to the local community. This of course does not mean that council goes to the community about every decision, but that it needs to be aware of the school community's views.⁵⁹¹

While the Committee recognises the authority of the School Council to make final decisions relating to dress codes and school uniform policies, it agrees that such decisions should involve substantial consideration of the views of the entire school community.

The Committee found a number of reasons why community consultation may be especially important for dress codes and school uniform policies. Above all, dress codes and school uniforms require a high level of compliance not only from students but also from the parents and carers of students at a school. While schools may develop and implement many other policies that do not necessarily affect parents directly, parents are generally responsible for the purchase and maintenance of school uniform items. A number of submissions noted that parents may also have a role to play in the enforcement of a dress code or uniform policy, in ensuring that their children wear their uniforms correctly.⁵⁹² Cooperation from parents is therefore essential to a school uniform policy working in practice.

Several schools noted that it can become difficult to implement a dress code or school uniform policy that does not have parental support, such as the following comment from the Committee's survey:

It is very difficult to maintain adherence to a dress code when parents do not see it as a priority.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁹ PSW Pty Ltd, Written Submission, May 2007, p.5.

⁵⁹⁰ Department of Education, Employment and Training 2001, *Making the Partnership Work: Role and Responsibilities*, Office of School Education, DEET, Melbourne, available on DEECD website, <<http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/schacc/MakePartnership.pdf>>, accessed on 30 October 2007, p.13.

⁵⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.14.

⁵⁹² For example, Ms S. Winter, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Charlton College School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Taylors Lakes Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2; Whittlesea Secondary College, Written Submission, July 2007, p.2.

⁵⁹³ Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

On the other hand, a written submission from Red Cliffs Primary School demonstrated that cooperation from parents can have powerful benefits for a school uniform policy's implementation:

Red Cliffs Primary School adopted a compulsory school uniform policy six years ago. The compulsory school uniform policy has total acceptance from parents and total support from Parent's Club. The policy...has almost 100% compliance. Students wear their uniform with pride.⁵⁹⁴

Several further submissions from schools also boasted that their uniform policy or dress code is strongly supported by their school community.⁵⁹⁵ The Committee notes that effective consultation is likely to increase the level of parental support for a dress code or school uniform policy, providing benefits both for the policy's implementation, and for pride and cohesion within the school community.

The Department's guidelines for school councils also charge them with a general responsibility for 'creating interest in the school within the community'.⁵⁹⁶ Mr Brian Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, told the Committee that dress codes and school uniform policies provide a particularly valuable opportunity for schools to engage their communities:

Whilst in one sense it is a low-level issue, it is quite an important way of engaging the community and then perhaps getting them engaged in other aspects of how the school operates. Whilst there are frustrations about school uniforms, I do not think school communities would want to relinquish the opportunity to make the decisions themselves, because they can engage the school community quite solidly in the discussion. Parents feel comfortable talking about a school uniform. They are not that comfortable talking about what year 8 maths should look like. It is a way of getting into it.⁵⁹⁷

While matters relating to teaching and learning may require special professional expertise, all members of a school community can participate confidently in the development or review of a dress code or school uniform policy. Thus, such policies represent an ideal opportunity for schools to strengthen the linkages with their communities, which are recognised as essential to supporting student learning.⁵⁹⁸

Key Stakeholders

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development recommends that consultation regarding dress codes and school uniform policies should actively involve staff, students and parents:

To enable a dress code to be fully workable, it should accurately reflect the values of its particular school community and should be produced by strong cooperation between students, parents/guardians and teachers.⁵⁹⁹

The Victorian Independent Education Union also agreed that decisions relating to dress codes and school uniforms should be made through consultation with staff, parents and students.⁶⁰⁰ The Committee's survey found that the groups most commonly involved in the development and review of dress codes and school

⁵⁹⁴ Red Cliffs Primary School, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁵⁹⁵ For example, Rosanna Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1; Spotswood Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Belvedere Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁵⁹⁶ Office of School Education, Department of Education 2006, *Roles and Responsibilities of School Council*, October 2006, Victorian Government, Melbourne, p.1.

⁵⁹⁷ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.9.

⁵⁹⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Principles of Learning and Teaching', available on the DEECD website, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/studentlearning/teachingprinciples/onlineresource/p6/default.htm>>, accessed on 30 October 2007.

⁵⁹⁹ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁶⁰⁰ Victorian Independent Education Union, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

'...in some situations, in secondary colleges where they have tried to bring the uniform up to a bit more of a fashionable sort of level...they do it sometimes in consultation with the uniform supplier but not with the students and certainly not with the parents.'

Gail McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria

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uniform policies are principals, who are involved by 96.0 per cent of schools, teachers (92.4%), parents (91.7%), and the School Council (85.6%).⁶⁰¹ A slightly lower proportion of schools consult with students (79.1%). Some schools also seek input from non-teaching staff (55.2%) or school uniform suppliers (52.4%). Additional groups identified as participants in consultation around school uniforms include other schools in the same network and, in the case of one religious school, the school's religious congregation. Only 3.3 per cent of schools involve a representative of the education system in which they operate (Catholic, government or independent) in their consultation process, and most of these are from the Catholic sector.

The Committee heard further suggestions regarding additional groups that should be consulted in the development or review of school uniform policies. The Law Institute of Victoria suggested that the Committee consider the new school uniform guidelines from the UK Department for Children, Schools and Families. These guidelines require schools to consider the views of minority ethnic and religious groups, as well as groups representing students with special educational needs or disabilities.⁶⁰²

Some jurisdictions in Australia also nominate additional groups to be consulted. For example, the NSW policy statement requires schools to follow a 'formal' consultation process which includes the 'Parents and Citizens Association' and local 'Aboriginal Education Consultative Group' where relevant.⁶⁰³ Dr Mark Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, suggested that greater indigenous involvement in consultation may be desirable for some schools:

There is a very good working relationship between the Department and VAEAI, which is great, but in some areas that relationship is very sophisticated, long-standing and well structured. In other places it may not be so good...We are happy to consult with all school councils. I guess if you look at the number of indigenous people on school councils it probably is poorly represented, so that might be something for us to take on board so we can have a say in the school uniform.⁶⁰⁴

The VAEAI also made a recommendation to the Committee regarding consultation between schools and their Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group:

Schools should be required to consult their Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group on all aspects of their uniform policies. First and foremost this consultation should establish what Koorie parents can afford to pay for a uniform. It should also examine what constitutes an appropriate dress code and appropriate enforcement measures.⁶⁰⁵

The Committee supports the view that consultation around dress codes and school uniforms should involve a wide range of stakeholders within the school community. The Committee notes that the parents of prospective students should also be given the opportunity to contribute; for example, the parents of primary students about to enter Year 7.

The involvement of students in consultation processes attracted considerable comment in submissions to this inquiry. The Victorian Students' Representative Council (SRC) told the Committee that it strongly supports the involvement of students in decisions about dress codes and school uniform policies:

The recent SRC Congress, representing over 25 000 students from 39 Victorian secondary schools, resolved with overwhelming agreement that the student body

⁶⁰¹ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁶⁰² Law Institute of Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.8.

⁶⁰³ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniform Policy*, Policy PD/2004/0025/V001, August 2004, DET, Sydney.

⁶⁰⁴ Dr M. Rose, Committee of Management, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.28.

⁶⁰⁵ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc, Written Submission, May 2007, p.3.

should have a say in decisions about uniforms and that school uniforms should be approved by the SRC before implementation.⁶⁰⁶

During a public hearing in the parliamentary chambers, many students took the opportunity to describe their experiences being consulted on issues associated with school uniforms. A number of students noted that they had been successful in getting changes through School Council, to reflect the needs and preferences of the student body:

We have just recently changed the design of our jumpers... [students] had said [to the leadership group] that they wanted it changed, so we spoke to the principal and other people. We had a survey and went around and talked to every class and asked if they would be interested in changing it. Because the result came back positive, we had to then take it to the school council, and then it became part of the uniform.⁶⁰⁷

For several years many students have tried to get a school scarf as part of our uniform. The majority of students believe that this will make our uniform look more sophisticated and will encourage a sense of pride. This year it was taken to the school council, and we were given feedback that they will allow us to trial a school scarf as long as we can show that we are wearing our uniform correctly — wearing our ties up and our blazers. Hopefully we can do that and we will get a school scarf.⁶⁰⁸

Others noted that they have had less success in implementing the uniform policies sought by student representatives:

At our school a lot of our students are unhappy with our PE uniform, which is a red polo shirt and basketball shorts. We were unhappy with the colours of it, because red is not actually in our school uniform; it is normally navy blue and white. We have put it forward to the school council quite a few times, and it has been knocked back every time because the pants we wanted were able to be bought in other shops, and it wanted them to be bought from our school uniform shop.⁶⁰⁹

An issue for a change in uniform that has been of great importance to the students at our school has been whether girls are allowed to wear knee-high black socks with a winter skirt such as the one I am currently wearing. Currently the situation is that students are only allowed to wear white socks; however, a vast majority of students—almost every student in the school community— as well as a lot of parents think that black socks are acceptable. We have had student petitions which have been sent to school council, but school council has often point-blank refused the change of uniform. Most teachers are extremely strict in the enforcing the rule of no black socks, even over black stockings when they cannot be noticed. This is of great annoyance to students at Kew.⁶¹⁰

The Victorian Parents Council Inc supported the view that students should be involved in decisions relating to dress codes and school uniform policies:

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.⁶¹¹

As noted in the following section, the Committee heard from a number of schools that provide opportunities for students to be actively involved in their consultation processes. The Committee notes that some schools involve students not only as contributors, but also as administrators of consultation processes, such as surveys and focus groups.

⁶⁰⁶ Ms G. Kennelly, Student Representative, Victorian Student Representative Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 4 June 2007, p.16.

⁶⁰⁷ Ms N. Harman, Year 9 Student, Kyneton Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.34.

⁶⁰⁸ Ms S. Cashin, Year 11 Student, Werribee Secondary College, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.35.

⁶⁰⁹ Ms E. Forrester, Year 10 Student, Shepparton High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.35.

⁶¹⁰ Ms E. Koehn, Year 11 Student, Kew High School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Assembly Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.35.

⁶¹¹ Victorian Parents Council Inc, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

'When changes to the uniform are being considered, consultation with all families, teachers and students is undertaken and student comment noted and considered. This includes consideration for dress requirements for those students from culturally diverse backgrounds.'

Euroa Secondary College School Council

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In the Committee's survey, one primary school reported that its students' input into the school uniform policy would be 'minimal' because of their age.⁶¹² However, the Committee found that although a higher proportion of secondary schools include students in consultation around dress codes and uniform policies (89.6%), the proportion of primary schools that consult with students is nonetheless significant (73.0%).⁶¹³ Throughout public hearings and written submissions for this inquiry, the Committee was impressed by the quality of contributions provided by students, at both primary and secondary level. In particular, the Committee notes that primary students were as capable as secondary students of engaging in insightful, relevant discussion around the mock 'School Uniform Bill 2007', during a public hearing at Parliament House. The Committee therefore does not believe that student age should be a barrier to participation in consultation, but acknowledges that it may change the nature of the consultation processes required.

The Committee suggests that student consultation may be a valuable resource for schools when developing school uniform policies. The Committee also believes that participation in a school community is an important precursor to participation in a democratic society. A dress code or school uniform policy may therefore represent a readily accessible opportunity for students to explore their rights and responsibilities as individuals and members of a community, and understand the possibilities and limitations of active citizenship within their school.

Consultation and Communication

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advises that schools should give some thought to an appropriate consultation process for their dress codes and school uniform policies, to reflect the importance of the issue:

Introduction of a student dress code is a major decision for the school and for the parents/guardians of children attending the school. In developing a student dress code policy, the school council should give careful consideration to the form of consultative process that will be undertaken.⁶¹⁴

The Department goes on to recommend that the consultation process should guarantee that teachers, students, parents and carers all have the opportunity to express their views. It also notes that the process should make provision for these views to be given 'careful consideration', before a decision is made. The Department suggests that the process for consultation should be identified in the dress code or school uniform policy itself, or recorded in school council minutes.⁶¹⁵

The Committee found that schools apply a variety of methods for consultation when developing and reviewing their dress codes or uniform policies. For example, Ranfurly Primary School reported that its introduction of a compulsory school uniform policy in 2006 came in response to a survey of the school community.⁶¹⁶ Eumemmerring College Council reported that its stance on uniform policy is decided by a school council vote.⁶¹⁷ A written submission from Taylors Lakes Secondary College detailed an extensive review of its uniform policy conducted in 2005 by a joint subcommittee of students, parents and staff. The review included two surveys of the school community on their views on uniforms and preferences for its design, resulting in a report and recommendations which were submitted to the School Council for ratification.⁶¹⁸ Ms Skye Shayne, Year 6 Student, Belvedere

⁶¹² Respondent, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁶¹³ Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

⁶¹⁴ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁶¹⁵ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ Ranfurly Primary School Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁶¹⁷ Eumemmerring College Council, Written Submission, May 2007, p.1.

⁶¹⁸ Taylors Lakes Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, pp1-2.

Park Primary School, described a similar consultation process, which occurred in her school in 2005:

The discussion about what students wear to school was a joint process between students, parents and the school council. A special committee was set up to organise the school uniform policy. There were surveys and questionnaires asking for people's opinions and ideas on suitable styles and colours. The final recommendations were taken to school council for approval before they were introduced to the school community.⁶¹⁹

The Committee also heard examples of consultation processes from schools that do not have uniforms. For example, St Kilda Park Primary School noted that its casual dress code is the subject of regular dialogue between the school and its community:

Like all school policies, the policy of casual student dress is considered on a regular basis through discussion at school council, staff meetings and parent and student forums. Comment is also invited through the school newsletter.⁶²⁰

At Princes Hill Secondary College, the school dress code has been discussed extensively at parent and student forums. At times, these discussions have addressed propositions that a school uniform should be introduced, which have been subsequently rejected by consensus from the parent and student bodies.⁶²¹

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development also advises schools to give consideration to effective communication with their communities when reviewing their dress codes or school uniform policies. The Department notes that items to be communicated include the consultation processes for the review; associated timelines; and any 'significant financial costs' that might be associated with proposed changes to the policy. The Department recommends that these matters be communicated to all relevant stakeholders, including the school uniform suppliers if applicable.⁶²²

Other Australian jurisdictions make more specific requirements or recommendations regarding the communication of dress codes and school uniform policies to school communities. In New South Wales, for example, schools are advised to be proactive in communicating their expectations about student clothing to all members of their communities:

Consideration must be given to effective ways of communicating about the school uniform requirements with different groups of parents. This may include, for example, use of interpreters or use of community media as well as school newsletters.⁶²³

The Committee supports the current departmental guidelines regarding communication with school communities during the development or review of dress codes and school uniform policies. The Committee also encourages schools to consider the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in any information they provide relating to dress codes and school uniform policies, as in all important school communications.

The Committee commends the many schools that make significant efforts to consult and communicate with their communities when developing and reviewing their dress codes and uniform policies. The Committee is aware that some exemplary models of consultation between school councils and their communities on other issues have been promoted through the Department of Education and

⁶¹⁹ Ms S. Shayne, Year 6 Student, Belvedere Park Primary School, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Legislative Council Chamber, Melbourne, 6 September 2007, p.21.

⁶²⁰ St Kilda Park Primary School, Written Submission, June 2007, p.1.

⁶²¹ Ms H. Stokes, President, Princes Hill Secondary College School Council, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Carlton North, 31 July 2007, p.3.

⁶²² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁶²³ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniforms in New South Wales Government Schools*, DET, Sydney, p.8.

Early Childhood Development.⁶²⁴ The Committee recommends that the Department enhance its guidelines around dress codes and school uniform policies by incorporating examples of successful consultation models.

Recommendation 8.2: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development incorporate into its guidelines for dress codes and school uniform policies examples of best practice in consultation and communication between schools and their communities.

Managing Challenges

The Committee believes that effective consultation is an important way in which schools may minimise conflict over dress codes and school uniform policies within their communities. Nevertheless, as parent Ms Jacinta Covington noted in her written submission, the views of school communities on dress codes and uniform policies cannot be expected to be unanimous:

What does it mean for a community to have a view? Members of communities have views. A community may reach a broad consensus on an issue. Rarely does a community have a unanimous view.⁶²⁵

Schools may therefore be faced with instances where an individual parent or student holds a view on the dress code or school uniform that differs from the community consensus. Some possible responses to such situations are outlined below.

Exemptions and Variations

In many cases where an individual has special needs with respect to a dress code or school uniform policy that differ from those of the broader community, it may be appropriate for an exemption or variation to be negotiated. As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, this may be especially applicable where an objection to the policy is based on a student or parent's religious belief or cultural background, or a particular physical feature or health condition. As further noted in Chapter 4, exemptions may also be applied in the case of a genuine philosophical or conscientious objection. However, the Committee acknowledges that such objections are likely to be rare, and that they will probably involve some form of discussion or mediation beyond the school's standard exemption process.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advises schools to provide information about exemptions in their dress codes or uniform policies. This should include the potential grounds for exemptions, including any that may be specific to the local conditions, and procedures by which exemptions may be requested and granted.⁶²⁶ Many schools noted that they grant exemptions in response to a note from the student's parents. However, Ms Gail McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, observed that a note from parents may sometimes conceal deeper issues around how compliance with the dress code or uniform policy is addressed at home:

... we are the first ones to say we have examples where some families find it a bit easier if the child is very strong-willed, that they will just write the note saying, 'It's okay to wear the jeans,' or whatever and feel a bit bullied into doing [it], because it does happen in some families. It is easier just to sign the note... because no-one is perfect.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ Office of School Education, Department of Education 2006, *Good Practice: Community Consultation*, October 2006, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

⁶²⁵ Ms J. Covington, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.5.

⁶²⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁶²⁷ Ms G. McHardy, Executive Officer, Parents Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, pp.41-42.

The Committee notes that contact with parents may therefore also be part of the exemption process, to confirm that the reasons for the exemption are genuine.

The Department assigns decisions regarding individual exemptions to 'the management role of the principal'.⁶²⁸ Nevertheless, the Committee recommends that principals take the views of their communities into account as much as possible when considering requests for exemptions from community-developed dress codes or uniform policies. The Law Institute of Victoria also suggests that schools should be required to give reasons for rejecting an application for an exemption to a dress code or school uniform policy, in light of the *Human Rights Charter* and equal opportunity laws.⁶²⁹ The Committee supports this view, and further suggests that individual exemptions should be noted in subsequent policy discussions or reviews, in case they indicate a need for broader policy changes.

Recommendation 8.3: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development publish further guidelines regarding best practice processes for considering exemptions to dress codes and school uniform policies, including a requirement that reasons for the refusal of an application for exemption be provided to the student and/or parent involved.

Finding an Alternative School

The Committee heard the view that if a parent or student disagrees with a dress code or school uniform policy developed by a school community, they should seek another school. The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals presented the view that uniform policies that have been developed through proper consultation with the school community should be a condition of enrolment at a school:

In terms of appropriate enforcement of sanctions, we believe that it should be approved by your school council and then backed by the region and the centre; by which I mean the Department of Education. Once approved, it should be a condition of enrolment and be non-negotiable.⁶³⁰

A similar view was expressed in a number of written submissions from government schools. Rowville Secondary College argued that compliance should be a condition of enrolment, in order to reduce the time spent on uniform-related disputes:

Our School Council believes that when a local community has determined its stance on uniform, it is perfectly reasonable that provided appropriate exemption policies and support structures are in place...support for the college policy should be a condition of enrolment. Too much time debating the uniform takes resources away from the core educational business – students and their learning.⁶³¹

Wangaratta High School agreed that adherence to a uniform policy should be a condition of enrolment and asked that the school be 'unreservedly' supported in this by the Department.⁶³² Similar comments from government schools were also received in the Committee's survey.⁶³³

Mr Andrew Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, indicated that compliance is widely understood to be a condition of enrolment in schools in the independent sector:

In attending those schools parents and students agree to abide by the policies of those schools, and schools will have appropriate responses to that, but it is a commitment that

⁶²⁸ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁶²⁹ Law Institute of Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.6.

⁶³⁰ Mr B. Burgess, President, Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 30 April 2007, p.4.

⁶³¹ Rowville Secondary College School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁶³² Wangaratta High School Council, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁶³³ Respondents, Education and Training Committee, *Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools Survey*, August – September 2007.

'Individuals have choices about which schools they can attend. They shouldn't have the right to undermine a school's reputation on setting high standards and having specific dress codes. If we are to allow individuals to do as they please why set any standards at all?'

Committee Survey

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you make as a parent, I think, and as a student if you are attending an independent school.⁶³⁴

The parents of students at independent schools in Victoria agreed that it is acceptable for schools to exclude students on the basis of non-compliance with uniform policies:

...wearing a uniform demonstrates the pride you have in your school. And if your school is advocating that you wear a uniform and you do not feel that that is appropriate, then you are at the wrong school; you should be leaving.⁶³⁵

The Committee notes that the issues faced by independent schools on this matter will differ from those faced by government schools, given that choice is one of the fundamental principles of the independent education sector.

For government schools, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's guidelines note that a school's dress code should be 'made clear to parents/guardians and students prior to enrolment, thereby providing a basis of assent'.⁶³⁶ This does not, however, indicate whether students may be excluded from enrolment if they or their parents do not agree to the school's policies. The SA Department of Education and Children's Services is the only education department in Australia to address refusal of enrolment directly in its guidelines for dress codes and school uniform policies:

Principals must not refuse enrolment on the ground that the student does not have the required dress code or because his or her parents state that the student will not observe the dress code.⁶³⁷

In the United Kingdom, the Department for Children, Schools and Families suggests that rules about a school uniform may form part of a Home School Agreement (HSA).⁶³⁸ The HSA is a written agreement, signed by the school principal, parents and sometimes students at the time of enrolment, serving as a formal record of all parties' commitment to the school's rules, policies and standards. However, the Department also advises that UK schools are prohibited by law from refusing enrolment to a student due to their own, or their parents', failure or refusal to sign the HSA.⁶³⁹ The Committee heard from two Victorian government schools that have instituted similar contracts, although it was not clear in their submissions what the consequences may be if a parent or student refuses to sign.⁶⁴⁰

The Committee believes that for many parents and students joining a new school, a commitment to the dress code or school uniform policy may provide a way to demonstrate their willingness to support and participate in the school community. At the same time, the Committee also believes that students and families have an obligation to comply with the rules and policies of the school in which they enrol. The Committee therefore accepts that schools may refer any families not willing to comply with the dress code or uniform policy at the time of enrolment, to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for mediation.

⁶³⁴ Mr A. Smith, Deputy Chief Executive, Association of Independent Schools of Victoria, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.34.

⁶³⁵ Ms J. Silver, Executive Officer, Victorian Parents Council Inc, Transcript of Evidence, Public Hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2007, p.10.

⁶³⁶ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

⁶³⁷ Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia) 2007, *Administrative Instructions and Guidelines*, May 2007, DECS, Adelaide, p.109.

⁶³⁸ Department for Children, Schools and Families (United Kingdom) 2007, *DCSF Guidance to Schools on School Uniform and Related Policies*, DCSF, London.

⁶³⁹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (United Kingdom) 2007, 'Home-School Agreement', *The Standards Site*, DCSF website, <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/hsa/hsa_law/?version=1>, accessed on 12 November 2007.

⁶⁴⁰ Taylors Lakes Secondary College, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2; Rowville Secondary College, *Student Dress Code*, copy supplied by Rowville Secondary College School Council, Written Submission, July 2007.

Mediation

The Committee notes that there are a number of reasons why disputes over dress codes and school uniform policies may arise. In many cases, the school may be able to work with parents and students to ascertain the underlying reasons for non-compliance, and negotiate mutually acceptable solutions. Parents Victoria's written submission noted that discussion or even disputes over uniform policies provide schools with a useful opportunity to deepen their understanding of the communities they serve:

Consultation challenges or concerns should not be ignored or feared but seen as an opportunity to draw information from the current school community members.⁶⁴¹

The Committee nevertheless notes that there will be circumstances in which an objection to a dress code or school uniform policy cannot be resolved at the local level, and may be referred to a system representative.

The Committee requested information from each of the regional offices of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development regarding the complaints over school dress codes or uniform policies that had been brought to their attention. Their responses reveal that 117 such complaints were referred to the regional offices in 2006. The Committee acknowledges that differences in reporting practices between regional offices may mean that additional complaints have not been recorded. The most common departmental response to complaints in 2006 was referral back to the school principal. Other responses included investigation of the issue by the department, or discussion with parents about the school's rights in implementing a dress code or uniform policy.⁶⁴²

While the Committee acknowledges the efforts of departmental officers in resolving the uniform-related issues brought to their attention, the Committee also heard some evidence to suggest that the current level of mediation offered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development may not always be sufficient. As previously noted, the Committee heard a case study of one particularly significant dispute over the uniform policy at a Victorian government secondary school. The parents involved expressed discontent with the way in which their complaint was handled when referred to the Department, as shown in the following comment:

[The Regional Director's] letters did not answer very many of our questions. They only stated we should discuss the issue with the school Principal. After two meetings with her...I told the [departmental] office I was not prepared to do that unless one of their staff members were present. At no time was this done. In fact I had to put everything in writing, but there is no onus on the school or the DET office to also do this.⁶⁴³

The issue of departmental mediation has also been raised more generally in a recent report from Parents Victoria. The report indicates similar difficulties to those outlined in the submissions received by the Committee, within the broader community of parents of students at government schools:

Parents reported high levels of stress and frustration resulting from their experience of complaint handling within DE&T...Few parents were provided with information regarding relevant DE&T policies and none were provided with copies of the complaint handling procedures. Parents believed that their complaints were not taken seriously by principals or investigated by the Department.⁶⁴⁴

Parents Victoria's report proposes a number of solutions to these issues, including the adoption of the principle of open disclosure; the introduction of appeal

⁶⁴¹ Parents Victoria, Written Submission, June 2007, p.2.

⁶⁴² Information supplied by the regional offices of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in response to a request from the Education and Training Committee for data on the number and type of cases and complaints associated with dress codes and school uniforms over the period January 2005 to June 2007.

⁶⁴³ Ms B. Johns, Parent, Written Submission, May 2007, p.11.

⁶⁴⁴ Parents Victoria, *Complaint Procedures and Dispute Resolution in Victorian Government Schools*, August 2006, Parents Victoria, Melbourne, p.1.

'...the implementation of a school uniform policy leaves unanswered what would or could the school do if students and/or parents chose to deliberately disregard it.'

Merri Creek Primary School

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procedures for parents; the development of a systems improvement process to prevent problems recurring; and the establishment of an independent Commissioner to resolve complaints.⁶⁴⁵ The Department considered the findings and proposed solutions in the report as part of its review of complaint handling procedures undertaken in 2006. Additional measures subsequently introduced by the Department include the dissemination of a model parent complaint policy to schools; strengthening of guidelines for parents and departmental employees; and the establishment of a central unit with responsibility for complaints handling processes within the Department.⁶⁴⁶

The Committee agrees that the Department has a potentially valuable role to play in mediating disputes relating to dress codes and school uniform policies that may arise between schools and their communities. The Committee believes that the above changes implemented by the Department will help to improve how such disputes are resolved in future. However, the Committee also notes the importance of relevant documentation, including departmental guidelines and individual dress codes and school uniform policies, in the resolution of disputes, as noted in the Department's current guidelines:

It should be noted that legislative requirements, the Department of Education and Training advice and individual school council student dress code policies are used by such bodies as the Ombudsman in resolving disputes referred to them by aggrieved parties.⁶⁴⁷

The Committee believes that the improvements to departmental guidelines recommended throughout this report will support the general changes to departmental mediation and dispute resolution processes. Greater consistency in the dress codes and uniform policies developed by schools will make it significantly easier for the Department's regional offices to assess them, and determine appropriate levels of support. Such improvements are also likely to help both schools and parents understand the nature of the support they can expect from the Department in the event of a disagreement or dispute.

Recommendation 8.4: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review the recent changes to complaints handling within the Department to ensure that they address concerns about the resolution of disputes relating to dress codes and school uniform policies.

Conclusion

The Committee feels that it is imperative that schools involve their communities in the development and review of their dress codes and school uniform policies. As parents and carers are responsible for purchasing uniforms and helping children dress for school, gaining their 'buy-in' makes enforcing a dress code or school uniform policy significantly easier. The Committee also believes that a policy which is developed and reviewed consultatively is less likely to be subject to time-consuming challenges and disputes. Furthermore, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, schools may need to demonstrate the consultative nature of their dress code or school uniform policy to satisfy legal requirements for 'reasonableness' under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1995*.

The Committee found that many Victorian schools are making considerable efforts to undertake effective consultation and communication with their communities around their dress codes and school uniform policies. However, the Committee also believes that there is still room for improvement in the consultation and

⁶⁴⁵ *ibid.*

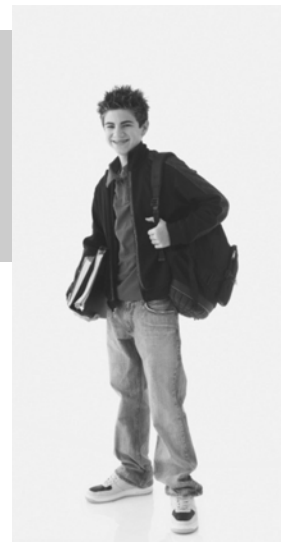
⁶⁴⁶ Ms J. Allan MP, correspondence to Parents Victoria, available on Parents Victoria website, <<http://www.parents victoria.asn.au/Allan-letter.pdf>>, accessed on 20 November 2007.

⁶⁴⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development 2007, 'Student dress code', section 4.8 (updated May 2006), *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide*, DEECD, Melbourne.

communication processes followed by many Victorian schools, as well as in the processes for handling challenges, where they arise. The Committee believes that clearer guidance around consultation and improved mediation services are some ways in which the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development may support the relationship between schools and their communities, with respect to dress codes and uniform policies. The Committee notes that increased cooperation in relation to dress codes and school uniform policies may also serve to strengthen such relationships in other areas of schooling.

Chapter 9:

Conclusion



This report demonstrates that developing a dress code or school uniform policy requires schools to address a wide variety of important issues. The dress code or school uniform policy itself may cover matters such as student health and safety, anti-discrimination, enforcement issues and the processes of community consultation. School uniform policies also require schools to consider issues relating to pricing, purchasing and distribution arrangements for uniform items. These decisions can have significant consequences for the whole school community.

The Committee notes that the current guidelines published by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provide a useful overview of many of the issues schools need to consider in developing and reviewing their dress codes and uniform policies. However, the Committee found that many dress codes and school uniform policies in Victorian schools currently address only some of these issues, and sometimes go no further than setting out the requisite colour or style of students' clothing. The Committee therefore believes that it is necessary to provide schools and their communities with clearer and more comprehensive guidelines, to ensure that all essential issues are considered. Most of the recommendations in this report describe the areas in which the Committee believes the current departmental guidelines should be revised or expanded.

In making these recommendations, the Committee recognises the Department's preference for providing advice and information to schools, rather than requirements and directions, as noted in its guidance for School Councils:

The directions given to schools are kept to a minimum with the preference being to issue guidelines for schools enabling them to make informed decisions.⁶⁴⁸

Nevertheless, a consistent theme throughout this inquiry has been that the issues around dress codes and school uniform policies are deceptively complex. While it may be desirable to allow schools to make decisions on each of these issues themselves, this also imposes the burden of researching each issue and assessing the merits of the different options available. In many cases, it may therefore be desirable for the Department to provide schools with recommendations or best practice examples that they may follow if they wish. The Committee believes that this will also encourage any schools that choose alternative options to give due consideration to their reasons for doing so.

The Committee further notes that many areas of school administration are currently supported by standardised templates. In addition to more extensive guidelines, the Committee therefore recommends that the Department develop a sample or pro forma dress code or school uniform policy, for schools to use as a basis for developing their own policies in consultation with their communities. The template should list all the issues that schools and communities need to address within the policy, based on departmental guidelines revised in accordance with the recommendations in this report. The Committee suggests that such a template may include, but should not be limited to, the following areas:

⁶⁴⁸ Department of Education, Employment and Training 2001, *Making the Partnership Work: Roles and Responsibilities*, Office for School Education, DEET, Melbourne, p. 14.

1. Rationale

- Purpose and objectives of the dress code or school uniform policy

2. General Information

- Nature of the uniform: compulsory, optional or no uniform
- Nature of items in the uniform
- Students to whom the policy applies
- Times and areas in which the policy applies
- Any requirements for other aspects of student appearance
- Any expectations regarding clothing or appearance for school staff

3. Health and Safety

- Sun protection policy
- Clothing options for different weather conditions
- Statement addressing student mental health and wellbeing
- Clothing options for structured and unstructured physical activity
- Statement addressing student security
- Any special safety requirements for general school activities or specific classes

4. Anti-discrimination

- Statement addressing gender equality
- Statement addressing equality between age groups
- Any special accommodations for particular physical attributes, disabilities, or health conditions
- Any special accommodations for items with religious or cultural significance
- Processes for responding to philosophical or conscientious objections
- Any additional accommodations specific to local conditions

5. Enforcement and Sanctions

- Expectations regarding enforcement
- Hierarchy of sanctions which may be applied

6. Costs

- Statement addressing pricing for uniform items
- Assistance available to families in financial difficulty

7. Procurement and Distribution

- Statement addressing procurement process
- Any standards of importance to the school community for materials or manufacturing
- Outlets available for purchasing uniform items

8. Consultation and Review

- Review cycle
- Review process
- Phasing-in time for changes
- Process for requesting and considering exemptions/variations
- Process for communicating uniform policy to the school community

The Committee acknowledges that many of the items listed above may be addressed elsewhere in a school's suite of policies, such as the Student Code of Conduct or Health and Safety policy. In such cases, a cross-reference to another school policy may be sufficient to indicate that the item has been considered by the school and its community. The Committee also acknowledges that some items may only be relevant to schools that choose to have a specific school uniform.

The Committee is not suggesting that departmental ratification be required for a dress code or school uniform policy, as is the case in the Northern Territory.⁶⁴⁹ Instead, the template and associated guidelines should be regarded as resources to assist schools and their communities to address key issues and implement best practice. Nevertheless, where a school is able to demonstrate appropriate consideration of the issues outlined in the template and guidelines, the Committee believes that they should receive the Department's full support for their policy's implementation. The Committee notes that a similar standard is set out in guidelines for dress codes and school uniform policies by the NSW Department for Education and Training:

Principals who operate within the policy framework will be supported by the Department in the implementation of this policy.⁶⁵⁰

The Committee also recommends that the Department make information available to parents and other members of school communities, clarifying the rights and responsibilities of everyone involved in the development, review and implementation of a dress code or school uniform policy.

The Committee would like to emphasise that the measures proposed above are intended to support the diversity currently evident in dress codes and school uniforms in Victorian schools. The Committee believes that improving the structural consistency of dress codes and school uniform policies will not unduly compromise the ability of schools to reflect the values and preferences of their communities in their standards for student clothing. However, as shown in the previous chapters, the development of a comprehensive dress code or school uniform policy, and the resolution of any disputes that may arise, can represent a significant investment of time and resources for schools. In the Committee's view, clearer and more consistent departmental guidelines and supporting resources will serve to reduce this burden on schools, and help staff, students and communities focus instead on the core business of teaching and learning.

Recommendation 9.1: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development create a template for schools to use in the development and review of their dress codes and school uniform policies, covering all major issues raised in this inquiry.

Recommendation 9.2: That in the event of any disputes regarding dress codes or school uniform policies, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development give full support to any school that can demonstrate that they have given appropriate consideration to all issues contained in the Department's template for dress codes and school uniform policies and associated guidelines.

Recommendation 9.3: That the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ensure that information regarding rights, responsibilities and processes relating to the implementation of a dress code or school uniform policy is available to all members of school communities.

Adopted by the Education and Training Committee

Committee Room, Parliament House

East Melbourne 3002

27 November 2007

⁶⁴⁹ Department of Employment, Education and Training (Northern Territory) 2007, *Policy SM-01.7: Compulsory School Uniforms T-9*, July 2007, DEET, Darwin, p.1.

⁶⁵⁰ Department of Education and Training (New South Wales) 2004, *School Uniform Policy*, Policy PD/2004/0025/V001, August 2004, DET, Sydney.

Appendix A:

Written Submissions

Name of Individual/Organisation	Date Received
Mr Phillip Moore, Teacher, Doveton	24 March 2007
Ms Trudy Little, Rosebud	27 March 2007
Ms Margaret Reith, Parent, Kinglake West	3 April 2007
Ms Carolyn Mann, Parent, Kinglake West	21 April 2007
The Salvation Army, Melbourne Central Division	24 April 2007
Ms Leanne McCurdy, Parent, Kinglake West	24 April 2007
Ms Kate Renzenbrink, Parent, West Melbourne	26 April 2007
Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals	30 April 2007
Ms Mary Ann Rosenthal, Parent, Eltham	1 May 2007
Heywood and District Secondary College	2 May 2007
The Cancer Council Victoria, SunSmart Program	2 May 2007
Willmott Park Primary School, Craigieburn	2 May 2007
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria Ltd	3 May 2007
Ranfurlly Primary School Council, Mildura	3 May 2007
Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria	3 May 2007
Department of Employment, Education and Training (Northern Territory)	3 May 2007
Dr David Warner, Principal, Eltham College of Education	3 May 2007
Ms Jacinta Covington, Parent, Brunswick	4 May 2007
Mr Peter Thompson and Ms Nickie Fidge, Seaford	4 May 2007
Victorian Multicultural Commission	4 May 2007
Students of 10C English, Braybrook College	4 May 2007
PSW Pty Ltd	4 May 2007
Spensley Street Primary School, Parent Association, Clifton Hill	4 May 2007
Spartan School Supplies Pty Ltd	7 May 2007
Ms Carol Wyatt, Parent, Cheltenham	7 May 2007
Noone Imagewear (T D Noone Sales Pty Ltd)	7 May 2007
Ms Sue Winter, Parent, Geelong	8 May 2007
Eltham High School Council	9 May 2007
Ms Bev Johns, Parent, Pheasant Creek	9 May 2007
	14 June 2007
	1 October 2007
	22 October 2007
Mont Albert School	10 May 2007
Ms Elicia Dickin, Grandparent, Mornington	12 May 2007
Grey Street Primary School Council, Traralgon	14 May 2007

Name of Individual/Organisation	Date Received
Mrs Eva Jahoda, Elwood	14 May 2007
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc	15 May 2007
Red Cliffs Primary School Council	16 May 2007
Merrilands College School Council, Reservoir	16 May 2007
Department of Education (Tasmania)	17 May 2007
Department of Education and Training (Western Australia)	18 May 2007
Strathmore North Primary School Council	21 May 2007
Manorvale Primary School Council, Werribee	21 May 2007
Manangatang P-12 College Council	22 May 2007
Trafalgar Primary School	24 May 2007
Ms Debbie Ballment, Parent, Mont Albert North	24 May 2007
Department of Education, Training and the Arts (Queensland)	25 May 2007
Ashwood College	25 May 2007
Orchard Grove Primary School Council, Blackburn South	25 May 2007
Mr Ange Kenos, Niddrie	26 May 2007
Ms Tracey Higgins, Parent, Mooroolbark	26 May 2007
Kambrya College School Council, Berwick	28 May 2007
Lyndhurst Secondary College School Council	29 May 2007
Anakie Primary School Council	29 May 2007
Maple Street Primary School Parents Club, Golden Square	29 May 2007
Princes Hill Secondary College, Carlton North	29 May 2007
Rosanna Primary School Council	30 May 2007
Hawkesdale P-12 College School Council	30 May 2007
Eumemmerring College Council, Hallam	30 May 2007
Pakenham Hills Primary School Council	30 May 2007
Little Yarra Steiner School, Yarra Junction	31 May 2007
Department of Education and Training (New South Wales)	31 May 2007
Ms Susan Porzig, Acting Principal, Swan Marsh Primary School	31 May 2007
Merri Creek Primary School Council, Fitzroy North	1 June 2007
Charlton College School Council	1 June 2007
Marlo Primary School Council	1 June 2007
Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Ltd	1 June 2007
	2 July 2007
Ms Susanne McCracken, Parent, Newport	3 June 2007
State Schools' Relief Committee Inc	4 June 2007
Victorian Student Representative Council	4 June 2007
Lyndale Secondary College Council	4 June 2007

Name of Individual/Organisation	Date Received
Tallangatta Secondary College School Council	5 June 2007
Euroa Secondary College School Council	5 June 2007
Essendon Primary School Council	5 June 2007
Victorian Independent Education Union	5 June 2007
Law Institute of Victoria	5 June 2007
New Generation Print & Copy	5 June 2007
Croydon Community School	6 June 2007
Atheist Foundation of Australia Inc	6 June 2007
Spotswood Primary School Council	6 June 2007
Belvedere Park Primary School Council	6 June 2007
Mr Brian Collingburn, Albert Park	6 June 2007
Carrum Primary School Council	6 June 2007
Bell Park North Primary School Council	7 June 2007
Rowville Secondary College School Council	7 June 2007
Wangaratta High School Council	7 June 2007
Bendigo Senior Secondary College Community	7 June 2007
Galvin Park Secondary College Council, Werribee	7 June 2007
Southern Autistic School Council	7 June 2007
Collingwood English Language School Council	7 June 2007
The Secular Party of Australia	8 June 2007
Apollo Bay P-12 College School Council	8 June 2007
The Port Melbourne Primary School Parents and Friends Association	8 June 2007
Carrum Downs Primary School Council	8 June 2007
Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee Inc	8 June 2007
Textile Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch)	8 June 2007
Glengarry Primary School Council and Staff	8 June 2007
Mr Tony Marsh, Parent, Baranduda	8 June 2007
Ms Kerry Clarke and Mr Larry Challis, Parents, Eden Park	8 June 2007
Sikh Interfaith Council of Victoria Inc	12 June 2007 20 July 2007
Heatherhill Secondary College Council, Springvale South	12 June 2007
Mr Jim Alsop, School Principal, Broadford	12 June 2007
Hampton Park Primary School	12 June 2007
Ms Karen Rolands, Parent, Kinglake West	12 June 2007
Taylors Lakes Secondary College	12 June 2007
Parents Victoria	12 June 2007
Department of Education and Children's Services (South Australia)	12 June 2007
Victorian Parents Council Inc	13 June 2007

Name of Individual/Organisation	Date Received
Melton Secondary College	14 June 2007
Melton Primary School Council	14 June 2007
Valkstone Primary School, Parent Community, East Bentleigh	15 June 2007
Ms Elizabeth Bromham, Kallista	15 June 2007
Footscray City Primary School	18 June 2007
Sandringham College	18 June 2007
Department of Education and Training (Australian Capital Territory)	18 June 2007
FairWear Victoria	20 June 2007
Bellarine Secondary College Council, Drysdale & Ocean Grove	20 June 2007
St Kilda Park Primary School	21 June 2007
Whittlesea Secondary College	16 July 2007
Ms Trudy Marshall and Mr Dean Marshall, Parents, Portland	17 July 2007
Ms Sharon Harriage, Parent, Ferntree Gully	23 July 2007
Sherbourne Primary School, Briar Hill	25 July 2007
Beleza Pty Ltd	31 July 2007
Eltham East Primary School Council	6 August 2007
Ms Kerrie Filgate, Parent, Upwey	10 August 2007
Islamic Women's Welfare Council of Victoria Inc	15 August 2007
Ms Veronica McGowan, Parent, Williamstown	21 August 2007
Mooroolbark College	10 September 2007

Appendix B:

Public Hearings and Briefings

Briefing – Melbourne, 16 April 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Helen Clarke	Manager, Community and Stakeholder Relations Branch	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Public Hearing – Melbourne, 30 April 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Brian Burgess	President	Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals Inc
Mr Stephen Franzi-Ford	Chief Executive Officer	Association of School Councils in Victoria
Dr Helen Szoke	Chief Executive Officer and Chief Conciliator	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Mr Matthew Carroll	Manager, Human Rights Unit	Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
Ms Leanne McGaw	Coordinator, Youth Engagement Team	Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
Ms Nadia Mohamed	Project Officer	Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues
Ms Gail McHardy	Executive Officer	Parents Victoria

Public Hearing – Melbourne, 14 May 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Anton Leschen	Regional Programs Manager	The Smith Family
Ms Joanne Silver	Executive Officer	Victorian Parents Council Inc
Ms Kylie Strong	SunSmart Program Manager	The Cancer Council Victoria
Ms Jennifer Makin	SunSmart Research and Evaluation Manager	The Cancer Council Victoria
Ms Emma Clarkson	SunSmart Secondary Schools Program Coordinator	The Cancer Council Victoria
Ms Justine Osborne	SunSmart Primary Schools and Early Childhood Program Coordinator	The Cancer Council Victoria
Dr Mark Rose	Committee of Management	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc
Ms Lowana Moore	Program Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc
Mrs Evelyn Sayers	Board Member	Association of Independent Schools of Victoria
Mr Andrew Smith	Deputy Chief Executive	Association of Independent Schools of Victoria

Public Hearing – Melbourne, 4 June 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr David Schmidt	Manager	State Schools' Relief Committee
Mr Ashley Van Krieken	Executive Director	Council of Textile and Fashion Industries of Australia Inc
Mr Stephen Stewart	Sales and Marketing Manager, Apparel/Yarns	Macquarie Textiles
Mr David Powers	Managing Director	Powers Textiles
Mr James Tonson	Project Officer	Victorian Student Representative Council
Ms Georgia Kennelly	Student Representative	Victorian Student Representative Council
Ms Kera Burnham	Student Representative	Victorian Student Representative Council
Mr Doug Flakemore	Student Representative	Victorian Student Representative Council
Ms Jennifer Rose	Policy Officer	Youth Affairs Council of Victoria
Ms Jacinta Cashen	President	Victorian Council of School Organisations
Mr Les Twentyman	Outreach Worker	Open Family Australia
Ms Sherene Hassan	Executive Secretary	Islamic Council of Victoria

Public Hearing – Melbourne, 25 June 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Anthony Sterpin	Managing Director	PSW Pty Ltd
Ms Michele O'Neil	State Secretary	Textile, Clothing & Footwear Union of Australia (Victorian Branch)
Mr Tommy Clarke	Project Officer	Homeworkers Code of Practice Committee Inc
Ms Gwen Harrison	Victorian Schoolwear Manager	Lowes
Dr Graham Barrington	Director	CE Wise Pty Ltd
Mr David Wilkinson	Former Teacher	
Ms Liz Thompson	Campaign Coordinator	FairWear Victoria

Public Hearing – Princes Hill Secondary College, Carlton North, 31 July 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr John Goodman	Assistant Principal	Princes Hill Secondary College
Ms Helen Stokes	President	Princes Hill Secondary College School Council
Ms Margie Pledger	Representative	Princes Hill Secondary College Parent Association
Ms Kez Abay	Year 9 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Mr Andre Dowsett	Year 12 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Ms Eli Dunphy	Year 11 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College

Ms Maille Halloran-Mackay	Year 7 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Mr William Kavanagh-Ryan	Year 7 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Mr Dylan Leach	Year 12 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Ms Thea Morgan	Year 7 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Mr Ashley Nesser	Year 12 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Ms Mia Wilson	Year 7 Student	Princes Hill Secondary College
Ms Gayle Lofhelm	Assistant Principal	Princes Hill Primary School
Ms Vennessa Fleming	Parent	Princes Hill Primary School
Mr Cato Atkins	Year 6 Student	Princes Hill Primary School
Ms Alessa Kron	Year 6 Student	Princes Hill Primary School
Ms Eleanor McAulay	Year 6 Student	Princes Hill Primary School
Mr Jamie Nicholas	Year 6 Student	Princes Hill Primary School
Ms Bridget Nielsen-Tuck	Year 6 Student	Princes Hill Primary School
Mr Max Resic	Year 6 Student	Princes Hill Primary School

**Public Hearing – Legislative Assembly, Melbourne,
6 September 2007**

Ms Claire Beggs	Year 11 Student	Apollo Bay P–12 College
Ms Courtney Gardiner	Year 10 Student	Apollo Bay P–12 College
Mr Joshua Trew	Year 11 Student	Apollo Bay P–12 College
Mr Daniel Bartlett	Year 9 Student	Bacchus Marsh College
Mr David Dodemaide	Year 11 Student	Bacchus Marsh College
Ms Essie Jansen	Year 11 Student	Bacchus Marsh College
Ms Elise Whitney	Year 9 Student	Bacchus Marsh College
Ms Bronwyn Buby	Year 12 Student	Ballarat Secondary College
Ms Stephanie Pittard	Year 12 Student	Ballarat Secondary College
Ms Courtney Sheridan	Year 12 Student	Ballarat Secondary College
Ms Stacey Thomas	Year 12 Student	Ballarat Secondary College
Mr Josh Centeno	Year 10 Student	Balwyn High School
Ms Grace Cliffe	Year 10 Student	Balwyn High School
Mr Jordan Rosen	Year 8 Student	Balwyn High School
Ms Jacqui Shemer	Year 10 Student	Balwyn High School
Mr Jarrod Appleby	Year 12 Student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Mr Jaan Butler	Year 12 Student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Ms Simone Hotchin	Year 12 Student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Mr Daniel Howells	Year 12 Student	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Ms Elly Gritzalis	Year 9 Student	Collingwood College
Mr Conway Hyde	Year 10 Student	Collingwood College
Mr Andrew Lomax	Year 11 Student	Collingwood College
Ms Morgan Pumpa	Year 10 Student	Collingwood College
Ms Shamira Armstrong	Year 12 Student	Eltham High School

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Mr Nicholas Hudson	Year 12 Student	Eltham High School
Mr John van Noorden	Year 12 Student	Eltham High School
Ms Larissa Vendramini	Year 12 Student	Eltham High School
Ms Ellana Hedger	Year 7 Student	Footscray City College
Ms Sinead Mildenhall	Year 9 Student	Footscray City College
Ms Anna Sturmev	Year 8 Student	Footscray City College
Mr Darby Turnbull	Year 8 Student	Footscray City College
Ms Victoria Gerard	Year 12 Student	Frankston High School
Mr Adam Greig	Year 12 Student	Frankston High School
Ms Chelsea Hogg	Year 12 Student	Frankston High School
Mr Stephen Toms	Year 12 Student	Frankston High School
Mr Ryan Close	Year 12 Student	Kew High School
Ms Emma Koehn	Year 11 Student	Kew High School
Ms Ashleigh Mullan	Year 12 Student	Kew High School
Ms Katie Watson	Year 11 Student	Kew High School
Mr Cameron Baker	Year 9 Student	Kyneton Secondary College
Ms Nicole Harman	Year 9 Student	Kyneton Secondary College
Ms Johanna Longmuir	Year 9 Student	Kyneton Secondary College
Mr Jack Mackintosh	Year 9 Student	Kyneton Secondary College
Mr Brendan Brentwood	Year 9 Student	Lowanna College
Ms Emma Forte	Year 12 Student	Lowanna College
Mr Jacob Keenan	Year 9 Student	Lowanna College
Mr Harley Wood	Year 10 Student	Lowanna College
Ms Hannah Brown	Year 11 Student	Melbourne Girls' College
Ms Erika Codognotto	Year 11 Student	Melbourne Girls' College
Ms Megan Pearce	Year 11 Student	Melbourne Girls' College
Ms Georgia Simmons	Year 9 Student	Melbourne Girls' College
Mr Patrick Clearwater	Year 12 Student	Melbourne High School
Mr Peter Harvey	Year 10 Student	Melbourne High School
Mr Alex Liao	Year 11 Student	Melbourne High School
Mr Dean Williams	Year 9 Student	Melbourne High School
Mr Jack Clarke	Year 9 Student	Sandringham College
Ms Nicola Hajnci	Year 10 Student	Sandringham College
Ms Charlotte Mardling	Year 9 Student	Sandringham College
Mr Robert Nyaguy	Year 10 Student	Sandringham College
Ms Sonja Dewar	Year 10 Student	Shepparton High School
Ms Catriona Forrester	Year 10 Student	Shepparton High School
Ms Eilidh Forrester	Year 10 Student	Shepparton High School
Ms Joanna Veal	Year 10 Student	Shepparton High School
Mr John Edney	Year 11 Student	Templestowe College
Ms Mollie Ellis	Year 11 Student	Templestowe College
Ms Annelise Milne	Year 9 Student	Templestowe College

Appendix B: Public Hearings and Briefings

Mr Marcus Reeves	Year 10 Student	Templestowe College
Ms Lizzie Forrest	Year 11 Student	University High School
Mr Jack Howes	Year 11 Student	University High School
Ms Olivia Koh	Year 11 Student	University High School
Ms Caitlin Koller	Year 11 Student	University High School
Mr Lochlin Deegan	Year 10 Student	Warragul Regional College
Mr Nathan Dubbeld	Year 10 Student	Warragul Regional College
Ms Kirby Taylor	Year 10 Student	Warragul Regional College
Ms Melissa Young	Year 10 Student	Warragul Regional College
Ms Shani Cashin	Year 11 Student	Werribee Secondary College
Mr Joel Fisk	Year 12 Student	Werribee Secondary College
Mr Johnny Hamilton	Year 10 Student	Werribee Secondary College
Mr Praveen Jacob	Year 10 Student	Werribee Secondary College
Ms Naomi Chapple	Year 8 Student	Western Heights Secondary College
Ms Kaytlyn Fitzgerald	Year 8 Student	Western Heights Secondary College
Ms Lyndall Morris	Year 8 Student	Western Heights Secondary College
Mr Jack Wright	Year 8 Student	Western Heights Secondary College
Mr Bradley Exton	Year 9 Student	Yea High School
Ms Brooke Lloyd	Year 9 Student	Yea High School
Ms Jessica McDonald	Year 11 Student	Yea High School
Mr Stephen Smith	Year 11 Student	Yea High School

Public Hearing – Legislative Council, Melbourne, 6 September 2007

Mr Shane Colley	Year 6 Student	Belvedere Park Primary School
Ms Amber Harry	Year 6 Student	Belvedere Park Primary School
Mr Ivanko Rakoci	Year 6 Student	Belvedere Park Primary School
Ms Christine Semertzidis	Year 6 Student	Belvedere Park Primary School
Ms Skye Shayne	Year 6 Student	Belvedere Park Primary School
Mr Nic Facey	Year 6 Student	Benalla Primary School
Ms Lydia Hanrahan	Year 6 Student	Benalla Primary School
Ms Holly Lessing	Year 6 Student	Benalla Primary School
Ms Sarah McNamara	Year 6 Student	Benalla Primary School
Mr Sam Schneidier	Year 6 Student	Benalla Primary School
Ms Georgia Boyle	Year 6 Student	Essendon Primary School
Mr Nicholas Carlei	Year 6 Student	Essendon Primary School
Mr Riley Gilbert	Year 6 Student	Essendon Primary School
Ms Catherine Lee	Year 6 Student	Essendon Primary School
Ms Hayley Roach	Year 6 Student	Essendon Primary School
Ms Kate Cohn	Year 6 Student	Laburnum Primary School
Mr Ben Fernando	Year 6 Student	Laburnum Primary School
Mr Max Karklins	Year 6 Student	Laburnum Primary School

Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

Ms Stephanie Ruth	Year 6 Student	Laburnum Primary School
Mr Callum Croker	Year 6 Student	Spensley Street Primary School
Mr Harry Heard	Year 6 Student	Spensley Street Primary School
Mr Marcus Hocking	Year 6 Student	Spensley Street Primary School
Ms Nicola Nelson	Year 6 Student	Spensley Street Primary School
Ms Anna Richardson	Year 6 Student	Spensley Street Primary School
Ms Perrin Boseley	Year 6 Student	St Kilda Park Primary School
Mr Hugh Kroker	Year 6 Student	St Kilda Park Primary School
Ms Ruby Rees- Wemyss	Year 6 Student	St Kilda Park Primary School
Ms Zara Sengstock	Year 6 Student	St Kilda Park Primary School
Mr Gabe Steger	Year 6 Student	St Kilda Park Primary School
Mr Harley Burgess	Year 5 Student	Surfside Primary School
Mr Lochie Cooke	Year 5 Student	Surfside Primary School
Ms Indira Narain	Year 5 Student	Surfside Primary School
Ms Danielle Neal	Year 5 Student	Surfside Primary School
Mr Lachlan Aitken	Year 5 Student	Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)
Ms Amanda Beattie	Year 6 Student	Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)
Ms Rebecca O'Connor	Year 6 Student	Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)
Ms Abbey Shaw	Year 6 Student	Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)
Ms Sarah Van Dorssen	Year 6 Student	Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)

Appendix C:

Northern Territory Meetings

Meeting – 12 June 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Mr John Glasby	Executive Director Schools – North	Department of Employment, Education and Training
Mr David Jolliffe	General Manager, Schools	Department of Employment, Education and Training
Mr Rob Picton	Assistant General Manager- Remote Schools Policy Services	Department of Employment, Education and Training
Mr Rex Symonds	Director, Schools Operations	Department of Employment, Education and Training

School Visit – Darwin High School, 13 June 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Marion Guppy	Principal	Darwin High School
Ms Jenny White	Assistant Principal	Darwin High School
Ms Claire Chandler	Year 10 Student	Darwin High School
Mr Ian Moriarty	Year 10 Student	Darwin High School

Meetings – 13 June 2007

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Denise Wilkowski	President	Association of NT School Education Leaders
Mr Julian Denholm	Principal	Good Shepherd Lutheran School
Hon Paul Henderson MLA	Minister for Education	Northern Territory Government

School Visit – Taminmin High School, 14 June 2007


Name	Position	Organisation
Mr Tony Considine	Principal	Taminmin High School
Mrs Robyn Morrison	Head of Senior School	Taminmin High School
Mrs Miriam McDonald	Head of Middle School	Taminmin High School
Mr Andrew Oliver	Head of VET	Taminmin High School
Ms Olivia Agostini	Year 9 Student	Taminmin High School
Mr Jack Bates	Year 9 Student	Taminmin High School
Ms Eileen Lim	Year 12 Student	Taminmin High School

Appendix D:

Mock 'School Uniform Bill 2007'

The public hearing at Parliament House on 6 September 2007 provided a unique opportunity for students to learn about, and participate in, Victorian democratic processes. To strengthen students' learning about how Parliament works and to provide a focus for their discussion, the Committee structured the Hearing around a mock parliamentary Bill: 'School Uniform Bill 2007'. The views students presented on the 'Bill' made a real and important contribution to the evidence for the inquiry.

The mock 'Bill' had six clauses, covering six topics identified in the Terms of Reference for the inquiry. To ensure that all topics were addressed in the hearing, the clauses of the 'Bill' were allocated to individual schools. The eight primary schools participating in the hearing were each allocated three clauses and the 22 secondary schools were each allocated one or two clauses (refer Appendix F). Schools could also propose amendments to any clause of the bill.

	Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools STUDENT HEARING
School Uniform Bill 2007	
A Bill for an Act to regulate uniform policies in Victorian schools.	
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Part 1 - Preliminary

1 Purpose

- 1) The purpose of the Act is to require all schools in Victoria to introduce a school uniform policy, and to regulate:
 - a) the nature of the policy;
 - b) enforcement of the policy;
 - c) health and safety considerations;
 - d) equity and exemptions to the policy;
 - e) uniform cost and purchasing considerations; and
 - f) the process for establishing and communicating the policy.

2 Commencement

- 1) The Act shall commence six months from the day it receives assent from the Governor of Victoria.

Part 2 - Provisions

3 Schools to establish uniform policy

- 1) Schools are required to establish a uniform policy for their students, being a detailed written statement which:
 - a) requires students at all year levels in the school to wear a uniform;
 - b) specifies the items of clothing which constitute the uniform; and
 - c) specifies the design and colour of the uniform.
- 2) Uniform designs and colours specified in the policy must:
 - a) be traditional and attractive;
 - b) encourage students and staff to take pride in the school; and
 - c) present a positive image for the school in the community.
- 3) The uniform policy must also require that:
 - a) students' hair is not dyed an unnatural colour;
 - b) students do not wear make-up; and
 - c) male students are clean-shaven.
- 4) The uniform policy will apply to students:
 - a) during school hours;
 - b) while travelling to and from school; and
 - c) during school activities out of school hours.
- 5) The uniform policy must include a dress code for school staff, being a detailed written statement which:
 - a) sets appropriate standards for professional clothing; and
 - b) requires staff to comply with the health and safety requirements described in sections 5.1 and 5.2 of this Act.

4 Uniform policy to be enforced

- 1) The school is required to enforce its uniform policy, to ensure that all students are in correct uniform during the times specified in Section 3.4 of this Act.
- 2) The uniform policy must clearly describe the disciplinary measures to be used in its enforcement.
- 3) In choosing which disciplinary measures to use to enforce the uniform policy, teachers should consider:
 - a) the seriousness of the breach;
 - b) the frequency of the breach;
 - c) the age and personal circumstances of the student; and

- d) the likely impact on teacher/student relationships.
- 4) Appropriate disciplinary measures include:
 - a) verbal reminders to students;
 - b) detention;
 - c) communication with parents; and
 - d) additional duties in the school community.
- 5) Disciplinary measures for enforcing the uniform policy should be chosen to minimise disruption to teaching and learning.
- 6) Disciplinary measures for enforcing the uniform policy should ensure that a student's learning is not adversely affected, and must not include:
 - a) withdrawal from class;
 - b) suspension; or
 - c) expulsion.
- 7) Where possible, teachers may confiscate items worn by students which do not comply with the uniform policy. Confiscated items must be returned to students no later than the end of the term.
- 8) No disciplinary measures may be used where a student has been granted an exemption to the uniform policy under Clause 6 of this Act.
- 9) An exception to section 4.6(a) is possible only when the student's continued presence in the class presents a risk to their own or to others' safety.
- 10) If a student is withdrawn from class for wearing unsafe attire, materials must be provided to ensure that their learning is not compromised.

5 Uniform policy to ensure student health and safety

- 1) To comply with the school's duty of care relating to student health and safety, the uniform policy must prohibit the wearing of:
 - a) thongs;
 - b) jewellery or piercings, other than a single stud or sleeper in the ear lobe; and
 - c) any other garment or accessory which presents a safety risk.
- 2) The uniform policy must require the wearing of:
 - a) close-toed shoes in all technology classes;
 - b) broad-brimmed or legionnaire style hats outside during terms 1 and 4;
 - c) shirts with elbow-length sleeves during terms 1 and 4; and
 - d) UV-protective sunglasses outside during terms 1 and 4.
- 3) The uniform must make it easy to identify non-students on school grounds, and to identify school students on school excursions.
- 4) The uniform must enable students to dress comfortably for local temperatures and weather conditions.
- 5) The uniform must enable students to engage in physical exercise during lunch breaks, physical education classes and sports, either:
 - a) by offering uniform options, including shoes, which permit freedom of movement; or
 - b) by permitting a change of uniform for times in which physical exercise is likely to occur, including lunch breaks.
- 6) If students are required to wear a different uniform for physical education or sports, the school is required to either:
 - a) provide students with private spaces so as they do not have to change in front of other students; or
 - b) permit students to wear sports uniform all day, on days when they have physical education or sports.

6 Uniform policy to apply equally to all students, with exemptions allowed

- 1) As far as possible, the uniform policy must apply equally to all students, and must include:
 - a) Equal or similar options for both boys and girls, especially shorts and/or trousers for girls; and
 - b) A range of sizes and designs to suit a variety of body shapes.
- 2) The uniform policy must allow students exemptions for the wearing of items required by their religion, including but not limited to:
 - a) hijabs, niqabs and burqas for Muslim students;
 - b) turbans, kirpans, and karas for Sikh students;
 - c) yarmulke for Jewish students; and
 - d) crucifixes for Catholic or other Christian students.
- 3) Wherever possible, the religious items permitted under section 6.2 must be worn in the colours of the school uniform.
- 4) Exemptions must be granted to students where the wearing of a uniform:
 - a) causes significant discomfort;
 - b) causes significant emotional distress; or
 - c) prevents students from participating in school activities on an equal level to their peers.

Grounds on which such exemptions may be granted may include:

- d) body size;
 - e) physical disability;
 - f) health conditions or allergies; or
 - g) emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- 5) Exemptions to uniform may not be granted on the basis of financial hardship. Where a student or their family is able to demonstrate inability to meet the cost of the school uniform, it is the school's responsibility to provide assistance as described in section 7.4 of this Act.
 - 6) The school may reject any request for an exemption which is not based on any of the grounds listed in section 6.4.
 - 7) If the school and the student, and/or their parent/caregiver, cannot agree about whether an exemption should be granted:
 - a) the decision whether to grant the requested exemption will be made by the Education Department; and
 - b) the student will continue attending school, either in or out of uniform, while the Department considers its decision.
 - 8) The school is required to maintain strict confidentiality regarding personal details which are revealed in the process of requesting a uniform exemption.

7 Uniforms to reflect appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements

- 1) In choosing items and manufacturers for its uniform, schools are required to ensure that:
 - a) most members of the school community can afford all items required by the uniform policy; and
 - b) the items required by the uniform policy are easy to obtain for the majority of the school community.
- 2) Except where this is not possible under section 7.1, uniform items must incorporate:
 - a) high quality, durable materials and manufacturing; and
 - b) fabrics and designs which are easy and economical to maintain.

- 3) Schools are not permitted to use the sale of uniforms for fund-raising. If uniform items are sold through the school, no profit can be made on the sale of these items.
- 4) The school is required to offer assistance in obtaining uniforms to families and students in financial difficulty, including:
 - a) uniform loan or exchange services;
 - b) flexible payment options, such as lay-by;
 - c) providing quality second-hand uniforms free of charge; and
 - d) applying to the State School's Relief Fund.
- 5) Financial assistance must be provided in such a way that students and families in financial hardship are not stigmatised or embarrassed.
- 6) School uniforms must only be purchased from manufacturers who can demonstrate that their manufacturing is:
 - a) environmentally friendly;
 - b) Australian made; and
 - c) ethical and non-exploitative.

8 *Schools to define consultation and communication process for uniform policy*


- 1) Schools are required to clearly define a process for:
 - a) establishing a new uniform policy; and
 - b) reviewing or changing an existing uniform policy.
- 2) Schools are required to review their uniform policy every three years, to ensure it continues to reflect the values and preferences of the school community.
- 3) The process must ensure that careful consideration is given to the views of:
 - a) teachers in the school;
 - b) students in the school;
 - c) parents/caregivers in the school community; and
 - d) significant cultural, religious and other groups in the school community.
- 4) If the groups listed in section 8.3 are unable to agree on all or part of a uniform policy, the decision will be made by the Education Department.
- 5) Any change made to the uniform policy must:
 - a) not come into force earlier than one year after the decision to change has been made; and
 - b) be communicated directly to parents through the school newsletter.
- 6) Students and their parents/caregivers must agree to abide by the uniform policy before they are allowed to enrol at the school.
- 7) The uniform policy must be available to be viewed by anyone at any time, either at the school office or on the school website.

Appendix E:

Student Discussion Questions

These questions were provided to help students explore and understand the issues in the mock parliamentary 'Bill', the 'School Uniform Bill 2007', which was discussed at a public hearing of the Education and Training Committee at Parliament House on 6 September 2007.

These questions were intended to be used by students and their teachers as a guide and a source of ideas in preparing for the hearing. While students could address the Discussion Questions for their allocated topics in their statements for the hearing if they chose, they were not required to do so. Rather, all schools were encouraged to approach their allocated topics in the way that was most meaningful to them.

	Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools STUDENT HEARING
Student Discussion Questions	
Clause 3: Schools to establish uniform policy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does your school have a uniform policy or dress code? What does it involve? How much choice does it give you about what you wear to school?• Would you rather go to a school with a uniform, or one without? Why?• Not all schools in Victoria currently have uniforms. Why do you think this is?• When should students have to wear their uniforms? If a student is wearing their uniform outside of school, is it still important that they wear it correctly?• How would it affect your school if the uniform policy was changed - either to give students more choice about what to wear, or to make the policy stricter?• Think about the different designs of school uniform you've seen. What do they say about the school? What do you think a good school uniform should look like?• Many school uniform policies are not just about clothing. Why do schools make rules about haircuts, make-up etc? Are there any other aspects of student appearance that schools might need to have rules about?• Should schools make rules about what teachers wear? Why might they be different from the rules for students?	

Clause 4: Uniform policy to be enforced

- How does wearing a uniform affect students' behaviour? Does it make students more disciplined, or does it make them more likely to rebel?
- What happens at your school if you break the uniform rules? Do you think the consequences are appropriate? Is it appropriate for students to miss classes because they are not wearing their uniform correctly?
- What are some of the reasons why students break uniform rules? Are they the same as the reasons for other kinds of misbehaviour?
- Should there be different punishments for students who break uniform rules, compared to students who break other kinds of rules?
- What effect does enforcing the uniform policy have on relationships between teachers and students? Does it foster respect, or cause conflict between them?
- How much time should teachers spend disciplining students who break uniform rules? How could schools make sure that their uniform policy is enforced, without causing too much disruption in the classroom?
- Is it better to reward students who don't break uniform rules, or punish students who do? Which is more likely to get students to cooperate?
- Should uniform enforcement be different for students of different ages?

Clause 5: Uniform policy to ensure student health and safety

- How does your school's uniform or dress code help keep you safe and healthy?
- Is it possible that a school uniform or dress code might prevent students from being safe and healthy?
- Having a school uniform makes students easy to identify. What are some times when this might have a positive or negative effect on student safety?
- How people dress can affect their emotional as well as physical health. How might a uniform support or endanger students' emotional wellbeing?
- If making a uniform safer means it is less comfortable, more expensive, or not as attractive, should schools make students wear it?
- Should schools which do not have uniforms still have rules about student clothing relating to health and safety? Or should students be trusted to dress safely?
- Should teachers follow the same rules as students when it comes to dressing safely?
- Do you think older students are more or less likely to dress safely than younger ones? Should there be different health and safety rules for different age groups?

Clause 6: Uniform policy to apply equally to all students

- How does what you wear to school show that you are unique? How

does it show that you belong to your school community?

- What are some of the reasons students might be discriminated against at school? How might a school uniform protect students from discrimination?
- Even if students are all wearing the same clothing, they don't all look the same. Does wearing a uniform really make students more equal?
- The Bill lists some specific religious items for exemptions to the uniform policy. Do you think all of these should be permitted? Are there any missing?
- If students can be granted uniform exemptions for special reasons, should other students be allowed to do the same? For example, should a non-Muslim girl be allowed to wear a hijab at school if she wants to? What if a student simply has philosophical objections to wearing the uniform?
- Do you think discrimination is more likely to occur in schools with uniforms or without? What other factors in the school might affect the level of discrimination?
- Victorian law states that government schools should be secular (non-religious). Does this affect whether students should be allowed to wear religious items?
- Some schools believe that if some students look different from others, it might make them targets for bullying or discrimination. Is it more important that all students look the same, or that some are allowed to look different?

Clause 7: Appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements

- Do you think it would cost more for you to wear a uniform to school, or to wear whatever you wanted? Why?
- Who decides where you buy the clothes you wear to school – you, your parents, or your school? How is this decision made?
- Some schools have cheap uniforms, whereas others are quite expensive. Why do you think this is? How might a cheap or costly uniform affect students and their families?
- Do government schools have a responsibility to help students and families who can't afford to buy the uniform? Or should those students find another school?
- How might a school help a student or family who needs assistance buying a uniform, without making them feel embarrassed or uncomfortable?
- Is it fair for schools to make students and their families buy the uniform if they can afford to do so, even if they would rather spend their money on other things?
- Do schools have a responsibility to set an example by buying uniforms from Australian Made, ethical or environmentally-friendly companies? What if this means that the uniforms cost more for parents and students?
- Should schools be allowed to make a profit on uniform sales, if this money goes towards improving the school?

Clause 8: Schools to define consultation and communication process

- How was your school's current uniform policy or dress code developed? Who had a say in the decision? Does anyone in the school community disagree with it?
- If you wanted to make a change to your school's uniform policy or dress code, what would you need to do?
- Has your school's uniform policy or dress code been changed recently? Why? What happened?
- How has your school community changed since you started school? How might changes in the school community affect uniform policies?
- Who should ultimately be responsible for deciding what students wear to school – students, parents, schools, or the government?
- How often should a school review its uniform policy? Who should be involved?
- Should students still have to comply with a uniform policy if it hasn't been communicated through the school newsletter? Who has the responsibility for making sure that students know the rules?
- If a student or their family doesn't agree with the uniform policy in a government school, should they be forced to go to a different school?

Appendix F:

Topics Allocated to Schools

The following list shows the topics allocated to schools participating in the hearing of the Education and Training Committee at Parliament House on 6 September 2007. These topics correspond to the six clauses of the mock 'School Uniform Bill 2007' prepared by the Committee (refer Appendix D). Each school delegation presented a three-minute statement addressing their allocated topic or topics.

Schools were also invited to move amendments to any clause of the mock 'Bill'. The list also shows those schools that moved amendments to each clause during the hearing.



Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools STUDENT HEARING

Clause 3: Schools to establish uniform policy

Statements

1. Apollo Bay P-12 College
2. Balwyn High School
3. Bendigo Senior Secondary College
4. University High School

Amendments

1. Eltham High School
2. Frankston High School

Statements

1. Benalla Primary School
2. Laburnum Primary School
3. Spensley Street Primary School
4. Surfside Primary School

Amendments

1. Benalla Primary School
2. Laburnum Primary School
3. Benalla Primary School
4. St Kilda Park Primary School

Clause 4: Uniform policy to be enforced

Statements

1. Kew High School
2. Kyneton Secondary College
3. Sandringham College
4. Warragul Regional College

Amendments

1. Kew High School
2. Warragul Regional College
3. Yea High School

Statements

1. Belvedere Park Primary School
2. Essendon Primary School
3. St Kilda Park Primary School
4. Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)

Amendments

1. Laburnum Primary School
2. St Kilda Park Primary School

Clause 5: Uniform policy to ensure student health and safety

Statements

1. Ballarat Secondary College
2. Collingwood College
3. Melbourne High School
4. Western Heights Secondary College

Amendments

1. Kyneton Secondary College

Statements

1. Surfside Primary School
2. Spensley Street Primary School
3. Laburnum Primary School
4. Benalla Primary School

Amendments

1. Benalla Primary School
2. Laburnum Primary School

Clause 6: Uniform policy to apply equally to all students

Statements

1. Footscray City College
2. Frankston High School
3. Melbourne Girls' College
4. Yea High School

Amendments

1. Werribee Secondary College
2. Balwyn High School
3. Melbourne Girls' College
4. Frankston High School

Statements

1. Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)
2. St Kilda Park Primary School
3. Essendon Primary School
4. Belvedere Park Primary School

Amendments

1. St Kilda Park Primary School

Clause 7: Appropriate costs and purchasing arrangements

Statements

1. Bacchus Marsh College
2. Eltham High School
3. Shepparton High School
4. Werribee Secondary College

Amendments

1. Werribee Secondary College
2. Yea High School

Statements

1. Spensley Street Primary School
2. Benalla Primary School
3. Surfside Primary School
4. Laburnum Primary School

Amendments

1. St Kilda Park Primary School

Clause 8: Schools to define consultation and communication process

Statements

1. Lowanna College
2. Templestowe College
3. Balwyn High School
4. Kyneton Secondary College

Amendments

1. Kyneton Secondary College

Statements

1. St Kilda Park Primary School
2. Belvedere Park Primary School
3. Stockdale Road Primary School (Traralgon)
4. Essendon Primary School

Amendments

1. Laburnum Primary School

Appendix G:

Committee Survey

Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools

1. Uniform policy or dress code

Information collected in this survey will contribute to the Victorian Parliament's Education and Training Committee *Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools*. Responses will be kept secure and confidential, and all data will be presented anonymously in the Committee's final report.

To progress through the survey, you will need to enter a response for every question on each page. If you miss a question, the survey will prompt you to complete it. Please answer all questions to the best of your knowledge. If you require any clarification or assistance in completing the survey, please contact the Committee at etc@parliament.vic.gov.au

1. Which of the following best describes your school's uniform policy or dress code for students?

- Full compulsory uniform: Full uniform specified by the school
- Basic compulsory uniform: Limited specifications such as school colours, or some items with the school logo
- Optional uniform: A uniform is available or recommended, but students are not obliged to wear it
- Occasional uniform: Uniform only required for representing the school or other special events
- General dress code: General specifications such as 'neat', 'safe', or 'appropriate' clothing
- No uniform: Students may wear whatever they choose
- Other (please specify)

2. Does your school have any rules related to aspects of student appearance other than clothing?

Please tick all that apply

- Hair length/colour/style
- Facial hair
- Jewellery, including ear piercings
- Body/facial piercings
- Make-up
- No rules for student appearance other than those related to clothing
- Other (please specify)

3. Which of the following best describes your school's dress code for staff?

- No written dress code: Staff may wear whatever they choose
- Implicit dress code: Staff are expected to dress to certain standards, but there is no written code
- General written dress code: General specifications, such as 'neat', 'safe', or 'appropriate' clothing
- Specific written dress standards: Eg shirt and tie, no denim
- Other (please specify)

2. Purchasing and distribution

1. Where can families obtain the items required for your school's uniform?

Please tick all that apply

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> School office | <input type="checkbox"/> On-site new uniform shop run by retailer/wholesaler |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uniform exchange service | <input type="checkbox"/> Local uniform shop or other local retailer/wholesaler |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On-site second-hand uniform shop | <input type="checkbox"/> Major department store |
| <input type="checkbox"/> On-site new uniform shop run by parents/volunteers | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

2. In selecting a supplier for its uniform, does your school set any standards or guidelines relating to manufacturing process or location?

Please tick all that apply

- FairWear/No Sweat School
- Australian Made
- Environmentally friendly materials or manufacturing
- No standards or guidelines relating to manufacturing process or location
- Other (please specify)

3. Are any of the following options available to families at your school, to assist with the cost of school uniforms or clothing?

Please tick all that apply

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible payment schedules, eg lay-by | <input type="checkbox"/> Application to State Schools' Relief Committee |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provision of second-hand items free of charge | <input type="checkbox"/> General school social support funds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Provision of new items free of charge | <input type="checkbox"/> No options available to assist with uniform cost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Short- or long-term loan of items | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

4. Are any items in your school's uniform required to have the school name or logo?

Please tick all that apply

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bag | <input type="checkbox"/> Shorts/trousers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blazer | <input type="checkbox"/> Shirt/blouse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hat | <input type="checkbox"/> T-shirt/polo shirt/windcheater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jumper | <input type="checkbox"/> No items are required to have school name or logo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PE/sports shirt or uniform | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |

3. Exemptions and variations

1. Are any students in your school currently granted full or partial exemptions from wearing school uniform on the following grounds? If not, would your uniform policy permit such an exemption?

	Student(s) currently exempted	Exemption would be permitted	Exemption would not be permitted
Body shape	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial hardship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Injury or health condition	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objection to uniforms on principle	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Religion or culture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>		

2. Does your school's uniform require students to have a blazer?

All students are required to have a blazer
 Only some students are required to have a blazer, eg specific year levels or school representatives
 Uniform does not currently require students to have a blazer, but school is considering introducing a blazer in future
 Uniform does not require any students to have a blazer
 Other (please specify)

3. Does your school's uniform include any of the following items for girls?
Boys only schools please tick 'Not included'

	Optional	Compulsory	Not included
Dress/skirt in summer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dress/skirt in winter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dress/skirt during PE classes/sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Health and safety

1. Does your school's uniform or dress code include any specifications relating to the following health and safety items?

	Optional	Recommended	Compulsory	Not included
Sun-protective hat in summer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Upper garments elbow-length or longer in summer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lower garments knee-length or longer in summer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Specific school bag chosen for ergonomic design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Change of clothes for PE classes/sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="text"/>			

2. Are students at your school permitted to wear sunglasses outside during summer months?

Yes
 No

5. Enforcement and sanctions

1. Which of the following best describes how your school's uniform policy or dress code is enforced?

- Strict: School enforces high standards of uniform or dress code compliance
- Variable: Enforcement depends on circumstances or individual teachers' discretion
- Lenient: School seldom or never enforces uniform or dress code compliance
- Other (please specify)

2. What are the possible consequences for minor and serious breaches of your school's uniform policy or dress code?

	Minor breach	Serious breach	Not applied for uniform breaches
Gentle reminder/encouragement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student requested to remove non-compliant item (where practicable)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student requested to replace item with compliant item borrowed from school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student sent home to acquire compliant item	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter sent to parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student requested not to return to school until wearing correct uniform	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting held with parents and student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suspension	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student excluded from certain zones/activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Student withdrawn from class to do school work in library, office etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Detention/extra duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify)

6. Consultation and review

1. How often is your school's uniform policy or dress code reviewed?

- Annual review cycle: Reviews are part of formal school council processes every year
- Variable review cycle: Reviews are initiated by changes or incidents in the school community
- No review cycle: There has been little or no discussion of uniform policy or dress code since its inception
- Other (please specify)

2. Which groups within your school community would typically be consulted in a uniform policy or dress code review?

Please tick all that apply

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-teaching staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Uniform suppliers/manufacturers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School council | <input type="checkbox"/> Government/Catholic/Independent system representative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify)
<input type="text"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Students | |

3. In the past 12 months, have any of the following issues presented significant challenges for your school with respect to its uniform policy or dress code?

Please tick all that apply

- Health and safety
- Anti-discrimination
- Cost and purchasing arrangements
- Enforcement and sanctions
- No significant challenges
- Other (please specify)

7. General comments

1. Are there any further comments you would like to make, relevant to the *Inquiry into Dress Codes and School Uniforms in Victorian Schools*?

8. School information

1. Please provide the following information about your school.

	Level	Sector	Region	Gender
School information	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

2. What is the approximate number of full-time equivalent (FTE) students currently enrolled in your school?

3. What is the approximate percentage of students in your school receiving the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA)?

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