

School Uniforms in New South Wales Government Schools



NEW SOUTH WALES
DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION
AND TRAINING



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Student Welfare Directorate

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For 18 years Muirfield High school had a dress code, not a uniform. As a result of strong community opinion a uniform was introduced. The uniform now distinguishes between the junior and senior students. The base of the uniform is black pants, shorts or skirt with the juniors wearing a collared polo shirt and seniors a white dress shirt and blazer if desired. A separate sports uniform is worn for PE and grade sport.





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Introduction

The following guidelines have been developed to support the *School Uniform Policy*. They aim to assist school communities to recognise the benefits of school uniforms that are supported by parents, students and staff.

Where a school uniform is agreed upon by the school community students are likely to wear it with pride. This sense of pride will be enhanced if students are involved in designing it and have been consulted about its implementation.

Principals are responsible for managing the process of reviewing and establishing agreements about school uniform requirements and for managing their implementation.

Benefits of school uniforms

The wearing of school uniforms by students will assist school communities in:

- defining an identity for the school within its community
- developing students' sense of belonging to the school community
- providing an opportunity to build school spirit
- enhancing the health and safety of students when involved in school activities
- promoting a sense of inclusiveness, non-discrimination and equal opportunity
- reinforcing the perception of the school as an ordered and safe environment
- increasing the personal safety of students and staff by allowing easier recognition of visitors and potential intruders in the school
- promoting positive community perceptions of public education
- making school clothing more affordable for families by eliminating the risk of peer pressure to wear transiently fashionable and expensive clothes.



The challenge at Georges River College, Oatley Senior Campus was to develop a uniform that would provide a range of choices for students and styles that could be worn to part-time employment or post school. There are now thirty variations of the mix'n'match uniform ranging from a modern 'corporate' look (shown on page 10) to a choice of distinctive, yet casual, garments for sportswear.



Principles

A school uniform should:

- cater for all students in the school community in a manner sensitive to gender and local cultural and social issues including cultural and religious diversity
- meet requirements of occupational health and safety, anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation
- promote the health and safety of students by identifying items necessary for particular activities e.g. items for sun protection
- include items that are affordable, comfortable, made from easy-care and easy wear fabrics, appropriate for activity and suitable for all body shapes
- provide girls and boys with equal access to the full range of school activities
- include strategies for promoting the wearing of the school uniform
- be reviewed regularly and amended as needed.

Other issues to consider

- Interest groups and stakeholders should be consulted early in the process to ensure the needs of the full school community are considered.
- Feedback from staff, parents and students concerning existing uniforms and ideas for change should be sought in a manner appropriate to each school community.
- Although hats may or may not be part of uniform requirements, students should wear hats for outside activities when appropriate.
- There may be advantages in involving suppliers in obtaining information about uniform options that are affordable and available.
- The cost of girls' and boys' uniforms should, so far as possible be equal. Schools may consider unisex uniforms.
- Careful consideration is required of:
 - the links with suppliers from whom clothing can be purchased
 - how clothing is made available to students
 - how practical difficulties in meeting uniform requirements might be addressed
 - the appropriateness of a phased-in introduction of new uniform items.
- The school may wish to support the Fair School Wear Campaign by signing the *Statement of Commitment*. Number 1. For further information on *Fair School Wear* please see the Fair Wear website at: www.awatw.org.au/fairwear or e-mail Fair Wear on fairwear@awatw.org.au

Legislative requirements

Health and safety legislation

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* (OH&S Act) the Department of Education and Training must ensure that students are not exposed to risks to their health or safety while they are on Departmental premises.

The Act also requires the Department to identify any foreseeable hazard that has the potential to harm the health and safety of any person on its premises and to take steps to identify and eliminate or control such risks.

School uniform requirements must take into account these requirements.

Examples of where a school has a duty to require a standard of dress in the educational setting include, but are not limited to:

- requiring students to wear appropriate footwear, eyewear or other protective clothing so as to avoid injury
- requiring students to wear a hat for outside activities when appropriate
- requiring that jewellery or other items that could, with reasonable foreseeability, cause an injury to themselves or other students are not worn.



School uniform agreements can reinforce identification with local culture and traditions. The students at Baulkham Hills High School are very proud of their almost unique 'Baulko Green'.

Staff have a responsibility to report potential and actual health, safety and welfare hazards to the principal.



Anti discrimination legislation

Federal and state anti-discrimination legislation make it unlawful for schools to discriminate against students on certain grounds.

The main grounds for discrimination in Federal legislation are race, sex and disability. The grounds for discrimination under NSW legislation include race (including ethno-religious background), sex (including pregnancy), disability, age, homosexuality, transgender status, marital status and responsibilities as a carer.

Anti-discrimination legislation contains two definitions of discrimination: direct and indirect discrimination. Both are against the law. Direct discrimination means treatment that is obviously unfair or unequal. Indirect discrimination refers to a requirement or rule that is the same for everyone but has an unequal impact and is unreasonable in particular circumstances.

School uniform requirements should be developed with these requirements in mind.

Flexibility must be used where implementation of the school uniform affects some students unequally; for example, where an aspect of the school uniform offends an ethno-religious belief held by students or parents. Other examples could include the disability or age of an individual student which requires a departure from an aspect of the school uniform.



Alexandria Park Community School has a range of different uniform garments for Stage levels in the school from Kindergarten to Year 12. The school also has separate 'dress', 'standard' and 'sports' garments. The uniform includes a number of 'uniform options' in order to be inclusive of requirements related to the cultural backgrounds of students.

Equal opportunity legislation

The implications of equal opportunity legislation are such that uniforms must enable both sexes to participate actively and safely in school life. Similarly, students with particular needs, such as post-compulsory age students and students who are pregnant should not be disadvantaged.



Promotion of school uniform requirements

It can be helpful to enlist the support of the wider community to reinforce pride in the school's identity by, for example, promoting students' achievements with photos in local newspapers and other media.

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.

In promoting the wearing of school uniform, principals must be sensitive to economic, personal, social and cultural factors affecting individual students and their families.

To assist families in need, schools should organise facilities such as clothing pools which may provide:

- low cost uniform items through bulk purchasing agreements
- items for loan
- second hand clothing
- uniform exchange services.

Parents must be advised about ways that they can access financial support if they are unable to purchase uniform items. New schools will need to consider ways to subsidise the establishment of a clothing pool.

Even when these support structures are in place principals must recognise that some families may have misgivings about having to apply for financial support or receive second-hand clothing. Special attention should be given to the needs of students with a representative role in the school. Situations will need to be dealt with individually and sensitively.

Subject to the above considerations, principals and staff should actively promote the wearing of school uniform by focusing on its benefits.



The cost issue was important to Harrington Street Public School's community. Affordable items were chosen including a blue tracksuit for the school's winter uniform, which looks smart. The school community believes that the recognisable uniform builds on protective and safety factors for students, making intruders in the school easily identifiable. The school has a clothing pool of loanable or purchasable uniform items and students leaving the school are encouraged to donate their uniform to the clothing pool.



Strategies to recognise and encourage the wearing of uniforms

Positive approaches to recognise and encourage students who wear school uniform may include:

- formal recognition of groups of students at assemblies or by other means
- reference to the uniform as part of recognition and promotion of the spirit of the school
- personal letters of acknowledgement to parents and students from the principal
- positive comments in school reports about individual students who support the school ethos, have pride in their school and represent it well
- reminders to students in practical classes that standards of dress have been agreed upon for the health and safety of students
- for senior students, reference to the school as a workplace and reminding students of the standards valued by the broader community and in workplaces
- staff modelling of those standards
- involvement of student representative councils and other student bodies in developing, discussing and promoting school uniforms
- consideration of alternative uniform items suggested by students which meet uniform requirements, but may be better styled, easier to look after, or more comfortable.



At Barrenjoey High School a uniform change was triggered when the material for the shirt of the girls' uniform was soon to become unavailable. After consultation the style, as well as the fabric, was changed because many of the girls indicated they would prefer to wear their shirts 'out', over the skirt. The project then snowballed when boys asked for changes to their uniform including cargo-style pants for summer and longer ones for winter. Both boys and girls now have the same sports uniform.

Despite the above strategies some students may not wear school uniform.

Under certain circumstances, occupational health and safety legislation provides the basis for principals to require students to wear school uniform.

Where the health and safety of the student or of other students would otherwise be compromised, students may be excluded from certain educational activities. Such action may also be required if a student's clothing compromises agreed upon school community standards articulated in the school uniform requirements, and might be considered damaging to the image of the school in the larger community context.

Alternative educational activities must be provided in such circumstances.

With the above exceptions, no student will have their access to learning reduced because they are out of uniform. This includes their continued participation in essential curriculum activities.



The uniform at Georges River College, Oatley Senior Campus, with a choice of interchangeable, mix'n'match items encourages the wearing of uniform by providing flexibility for students.

A student should not be suspended or expelled solely for not wearing school uniform. It is inappropriate to use negative mentions in references or school reports as strategies.

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. Objections may be based on sensitive issues, such as cultural or family traditions, family circumstances or financial issues that may not be disclosed readily. These objections must be respected. However non-confrontational approaches should be used to engage parents in clarifying the reasons for their objection. Strategies available to the principal include long term exemptions from the requirements. See page 12.



Strategies that may assist for individual students resisting the wearing of school uniform include:

- speaking to the student (preferably in private) to encourage wearing of the school uniform
- providing a verbal warning to student
- providing advice to the parents via a phone call or letter from the principal
- inviting parents to the school to discuss the situation with the principal or another staff member
- negotiating an appropriate course of action with the student and parents.

Strategies such as imposing additional duties, should be clarified, agreed upon by the school community and documented. They must be applied fairly and consistently.



At Rooty Hill High School parents believe that the previous uniform did not reflect the dynamic and modern nature of the school. With the help of school staff, a parent group consulted widely with other parents and students. A sports-style uniform was chosen as this style was widely supported by students and parents. It suits active participation of both girls and boys, in school life.

Exemptions for students from the school uniform

Formal short and long term exemption processes can be incorporated into school uniform policies where appropriate. Short term exemptions can be provided to students where temporary circumstances prevent the wearing of the school uniform. This may include circumstances where a student is staying with extended family or other short term carer(s) but will return to a home school.

School procedures for seeking a short term exemption, such as a letter from parents or verbal communication with them; and procedures for granting an exemption, such as the provision of an exemption card; should be documented.

From time to time individual parents may seek variations in school uniform requirements. Long term exemptions would be provided when:

- an aspect of the school uniform requirements prevents students from complying with a requirement relating to their ethno-religious background
- the student has a particular health condition that requires a modification of an aspect of the requirements
- the student is disadvantaged in complying with an aspect of the uniform because of other personal circumstances outlined in anti-discrimination and equal opportunity legislation.

In many cases a slight modification of the school uniform requirement may be all that is needed, rather than a long term exemption. Therefore, a centralised record of requested exemptions and modifications should be kept. Where patterns of exemptions and modifications are identified over a period of time they should be taken into account in a subsequent review of school uniform requirements.

Some students and their families may have an aversion to applying for exemptions from wearing the uniform. They may consider the uniform to be alienating. In these cases it may be helpful to adopt informal exemption processes.

Informal exemptions should be provided when temporary extreme weather conditions or temporary health conditions require the wearing of protective or other clothing outside uniform requirements.



Resolving conflict

All efforts should be made to resolve or deal with conflict before it becomes entrenched between staff and particular students and their families.

Where conflict arises between schools, students and parents with regard to school uniform, efforts should be made to resolve these at the school level. If, after discussions have been held, acceptable adherence or an acceptable compromise cannot be reached, students and parents should be advised of their right to lodge a formal suggestion or complaint according to Departmental procedures.

Additional note:

School uniforms and protection from the sun

The issue of protecting students from the dangers associated with sun exposure needs to be taken seriously under occupational health and safety legislation.

It is a matter for each school community to determine how best to address the issue of sun protection. This may or may not involve formal school uniform requirements.

Protection from the Sun Guidelines and the brochure *Sun Shade in Schools* assists schools to implement a broad range of strategies and provisions to minimise harm associated with exposure to the sun.

These strategies include encouraging students to:

- remain in the shade as much as possible during peak times of ultra-violet radiation (UVR)
- use a sunscreen
- wear clothing that protects the arms and neck.

Schools are also encouraged to schedule outdoor activities out of peak UVR times or in shaded venues.



Malabar Public School's community decided that the main goal of school uniforms was to develop a sense of pride in the school. After extensive consultation they decided on a uniform that was practical and provided effective sun protection. The uniform now includes long shorts for girls and attractive large brimmed hats. A tailored jacket is an option in winter for older students and is worn when students represent the school in formal activities.



Appendix

Checklists

The following checklists are provided for the principal's use. Completed checklists may also be provided to regional senior officers to assist them to support principals in dealing with difficult matters. Completed checklists will provide background information when matters are referred, for follow up, at a higher level in the Department.

| Reviewing school uniform requirements | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|---|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Has a school uniform committee or working group including representatives from executive, staff, parents and students been established?</p> <p>Have members of the committee or working group been briefed on current legislative requirements and Departmental policy?</p> <p>Have data been collected from relevant school records, surveys and interviews and resulting implications considered?</p> <p>Has discussion been invited from the whole school community with fairness to all groups of students, staff and parents?</p> <p>Have information and viewpoints collected during these processes been carefully considered?</p> <p>Has the committee collaboratively developed a number of options for school uniforms, for consultation?</p> <p>Has feedback been considered and a school uniform decided upon which has the majority of support from parents and students?</p> <p>Have requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety Act been met?</p> <p>Have requirements of Anti-discrimination and Equal Opportunity legislation been met?</p> <p>Do students generally like the school uniform proposed?</p> | | |



| | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|--|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Have students, parents and school staff been involved in deciding on precise school uniform requirements, e.g. what is appropriate jewellery?</p> <p>Has the school uniform been documented?</p> <p>Have strategies to promote the school uniform been developed?</p> <p>Have strategies for students resisting the wearing of school uniform been clarified, agreed upon by the school community and documented?</p> <p>Has the new school uniform been introduced in ways that celebrate and promote pride in the school's achievements?</p> <p>Has a timeline for the complete introduction of the new school uniform (up to three years) been set?</p> <p>Have uniform suppliers been advised early in the year preceding the year where complete introduction will take place?</p> <p>Have decisions been made about when and how a future review of the new school uniform will take place?</p> <p>Has documentation of the school's uniform policy and a brief statement about consultation undertaken been filed in the school?</p> | | |

| Establishing a new school uniform | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|--|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Have all steps outlined above been followed in reviewing the school uniform?</p> <p>Are all provisions in the school uniform requirements clearly defined?</p> <p>Have staff, students and parents been fully informed of the school uniform requirements?</p> <p>Have a number of approaches been used to effectively inform different groups of parents, eg community media, translators, displays in shopping and community centres?</p> | | |



| | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|---|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Are newly enrolled students and their parents informed of the school uniform?</p> <p>Has a clothing pool been set up?</p> <p>Is there a focus on strategies for recognition and reinforcement and are they applied consistently e.g. positive comments, awards?</p> <p>Are students involved in promoting adherence to the school uniform?</p> | | |

| Dealing with students who are out of uniform | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|---|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Is not wearing a uniform related to an aspect of it that affects the student unequally compared to other students on the grounds of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – race – ethno-religion – sex – pregnancy – disability – age – homosexuality – transgender status – responsibilities as a carer – marital status? <p>If yes to the previous question, can a long term exemption be provided?</p> <p>Where a long term exemption has been provided has this been noted for consideration in the next review of the school uniform?</p> <p>Is the student’s non-adherence due to a temporary difficulty outside the criteria for a short term exemption?</p> <p>If yes to the previous question, can an exemption be granted?</p> <p>Is the student’s non-adherence due to practical or economic difficulties?</p> | | |



| | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|--|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>If yes to the previous question, has support been provided, e.g. access to the clothing pool or the student assistance scheme?</p> <p>Does the non-adherence pose a risk to the health and safety of the student or other students?</p> <p>If yes to the previous question, have the school's responsibilities under occupational health and safety been clearly communicated to the student and parents?</p> <p>Has the student been spoken to (preferably in private) to encourage him/her to wear school uniform?</p> <p>Have parents been advised where students are not wearing uniform and an explanation been requested?</p> <p>Can adherence be achieved through discussion between a member of staff and the student, and parents, if appropriate?</p> | | |

| Attempting resolution | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|--|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Does the student continue not to wear the school uniform?</p> <p>Have parents been fully informed that the student remains resistant to the wearing of school uniform despite the use of strategies to address this?</p> <p>Have copies of relevant documents, including notes, letters and statements been provided to the student and parents?</p> <p>Is either party fearful or intimidated by the other party? If yes to this question, go straight to the next section <i>Where a resolution has not been reached</i>.</p> | | |



| | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|---|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Has a meeting been arranged with the principal or other staff member and the student and parents so each has an opportunity to respond to the concerns raised?</p> <p>If yes to the previous question, has the meeting provided 'a fair hearing' – the opportunity for all parties to raise and explore relevant issues?</p> <p>If appropriate, has an interpreter or a support person been provided?</p> <p>Have issues been identified which could indicate the need for a long term exemption for the student?</p> <p>If yes to the previous question, has this been followed up with appropriate exemption processes?</p> <p>Have options been explored, and an option agreed upon by the student and parents that will result in an acceptable outcome?</p> <p>If no to the previous question, has negotiation of an acceptable compromise by either or both parties been attempted and achieved?</p> | | |

| Where a resolution has not been achieved | Yes | No (Indicate if N/A) |
|---|-----|-------------------------|
| <p>Can the matter be resolved through discussion between parents, and the student if appropriate, and the student services officer, student support coordinator or the school education director?</p> <p>If yes to the previous question, has this discussion been arranged and relevant information provided to the officer, coordinator or director?</p> <p>If no, have the student and parents been informed that they should formally lodge their objection as a suggestion or a complaint?</p> | | |



