



ACT
Government
Education



**DRESS STANDARD AND
UNIFORMS IN
CANBERRA PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

GUIDELINE

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Introduction

The following guidelines have been developed to support the *Dress Standards and Uniforms in Canberra Public Schools* policy with specific reference to school uniforms. They aim to assist school communities to recognise the benefits of dress standards that are supported by parents/carers, students and staff.

Where a dress standard 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 dress standard requirements and for managing their implementation. These Guidelines also provides information to inform the development of schools' policies and procedures as well as strategies to encourage the wearing of school uniforms.

Benefits of school uniforms

The wearing of school uniforms by students can 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.

Principles

Several principles should be followed when designing and implementing a school based policy and school uniform.

- Uniforms should cater for all students in the school community in a manner sensitive to diverse gender identities and local cultural and social issues including cultural and religious diversity.
- Uniforms should meet requirements of work health and safety, anti-discrimination and human rights legislation.
- School based uniform policies should have standards which apply to all students equally, regardless of gender identity, for example, wearing of make-up, jewellery, length of uniform.
- School based uniform policies should promote freedom of choice for all students by

categorising options by clothing type rather than by gender, for example, shorts, trousers, skirts rather than boy's uniform/ girl's uniform. Of the items which a school designates as a school uniform, limiting a student's choice of school uniforms items to dress in due to gender, may infringe the ACT Discrimination Act (1991).

- Uniforms should promote the health and safety of students by identifying items necessary for particular activities e.g. items for sun protection.
- Uniforms should include items that are affordable, comfortable, made from easy-care and easy wear fabrics, appropriate for activity and suitable for all body shapes.
- Uniforms should be sourced from ethical producers who are committed to an ethical supply chain and publishing a list of their factories and suppliers.
- Uniforms should provide all students with equal access to the full range of school activities.
- School based uniform policies should be reviewed regularly and amended as needed.

There are other issues to consider when planning school dress standards and uniforms.

- 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 or dress standards and ideas for change should be sought in a manner appropriate to each school community.
- Ideas for strategies to promote the wearing of the school uniform could form part of this discussion.
- There may be advantages in involving suppliers to obtain information about uniform options that are affordable and readily available.
- The cost of uniforms should be equitable.
- Careful consideration is required of:
 - ACT Procurement processes
 - 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.
- As preschool students attend for a smaller proportion of the week, the school community at individual schools will be involved in the decision of whether preschool students should wear school uniform.
- Wherever possible, schools should ensure uniforms are sourced from ethical producers who are committed to an ethical supply chain and publishing a list of their factories and suppliers (unless the costs involved are unreasonably expensive for parents and carers). Schools may also wish to encourage their uniform provider to join the Ethical Australia accreditation scheme. For more details see the Go Ethical website: www.ethical.org.au.
- High school students attending an educational program at a Canberra Public College will be required to follow the college dress standards.

Legislative requirements

Work Health and Safety Legislation

Under the *ACT Work Health and Safety Act (2011)* schools must ensure students are not exposed to risks to their health or safety while they are on Directorate premises.

The *Act* also requires schools 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.

The school's student dress standard and uniform policy and procedure 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 to avoid injury
- requiring students to wear a hat for outside activities when appropriate
- requiring that jewellery or other items that could, with reasonable predictability, cause an injury to themselves or other students are not worn.

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

Human Rights Legislation

Under the *ACT Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)* it is unlawful for public authorities to act in a way that is incompatible with a human right – in this case, the right to education. The school uniform policy and school dress standard should be implemented in such a way to ensure students are not prevented from accessing education. The Act also makes it unlawful for schools to discriminate against students on certain grounds. The implications are such that uniforms must enable students to participate actively and safely in school life without discrimination.

Anti Discrimination Legislation

Under the *ACT Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)* the grounds for discrimination under ACT legislation include race (including cultural background), sex, pregnancy, breastfeeding, disability, age, sexuality, gender identity, religious conviction 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 a student who is pregnant and requires a departure from an aspect of the school uniform.

For example, it is discriminatory to impose a uniform standard that is incompatible with religious dress standards such as the wearing of a Sikh turban or a Muslim hijab. It would also be discriminatory to require a student to wear a uniform that is incompatible with their gender identity or preferred presentation.

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 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.

Strategies to recognise and encourage the wearing of uniforms

Individual schools will have different ideas about positive approaches to recognise and encourage students who wear school uniform. Some examples 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
- reminders to students in practical classes that standards of dress have been agreed upon for the health and safety of students
- for older 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
- opportunities for students to suggest uniform items that would be appealing to the student cohort from the perspective of style, easy maintenance and comfort.

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

Under certain circumstances, work 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 dress standard policy, 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.

A student should not be suspended for not wearing school uniform. It is inappropriate to use negative comments in references or school reports as strategies. When considering the application of sanctions for a student not wearing school uniform, consideration should be given to the student's wellbeing.

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 *Exemptions for students from the school uniform* below.

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.

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, temporary extreme weather conditions or temporary health conditions require the wearing of protective or other clothing outside uniform requirements.

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 or adjustments to the uniform 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 falling within anti-discrimination 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 confidential 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.

Schools from time to time may wish to have a non-uniform day (e.g. carnival/fun day, raising funds for a charity etc). Student clothing on these non-uniform days should be guided by the school's dress standards for such occasions and approved by the school board, being mindful of the community expectations and the public image of the school.

Refer to Dress Standards and Uniforms in Canberra Public Schools Policy section 5.2 for further information about Exemptions.

Addressing Issues with Uniform Requirements

If conflict arises between the school, 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 with the school, including the principal and acceptable adherence or an acceptable compromise cannot be reached, students and parents should be reminded of their right to lodge a formal suggestion or complaint according to Directorate procedures.

Appendix

Checklists

If schools would like support in relation to school uniform implementation, the following are optional checklists provided for the principal's use. Completed checklists may also be provided to School Network Leaders to assist them to support principals. Completed checklists will provide background information when matters are referred for follow up.

Reviewing school uniform requirements	Yes	No or (N/A)
Has a school uniform committee or working group including representatives from executive, staff, parents and students been established?		
Have members of the committee or working group been briefed on current legislative requirements and Directorate policy?		
Has data been collected from relevant school records, surveys and interviews and resulting implications considered?		
Has discussion been invited from the whole school community with fairness to all groups of students, staff and parents?		
Have information and viewpoints collected during these processes been carefully considered?		
Has the committee collaboratively developed a number of options for school uniforms, for consultation?		
Has feedback been considered and a school uniform decided upon which has support from the majority of parents and students?		
Have requirements of the Work Health and Safety Act been met?		
Have requirements of Anti-discrimination and Human Rights legislation been met?		
Do students generally like the school uniform proposed?		
Have students, parents and school staff been involved in deciding on precise school uniform requirements, e.g. what is appropriate jewellery?		
Has the school uniform been documented?		
Have strategies to promote the school uniform been developed?		
Have strategies for students resisting the wearing of school uniform been clarified, agreed upon by the school community and documented?		
Has the new school uniform been introduced in ways that celebrate and promote pride in the school's achievements?		
Has a timeline for the complete introduction of the new school uniform (up to three years) been set?		
Has the ACT Procurement Process been followed?		
Have uniforms been sourced from ethical producers who are committed to an ethical supply chain and publishing a list of their factories and suppliers?		

Establishing a new school uniform	Yes	No or (N/A)
Have decisions been made about when and how a future review of the new school uniform will take place?		
Has documentation of the school's uniform policy and a brief statement about consultation undertaken been filed in the school?		
Have all steps outlined in "Reviewing School Uniform Requirements" been followed in reviewing the school uniform?		
Are all provisions in the school uniform requirements clearly defined?		
Have staff, students and parents been fully informed of the school uniform requirements?		
Have a number of approaches been used to effectively inform different groups of parents, e.g. community media, translators, displays in shopping and community centres?		
Are newly enrolled students and their parents informed of the school uniform?		
Has a clothing pool been set up?		
Is there a focus on strategies for recognition and reinforcement and are they applied consistently e.g. positive comments, awards?		
Are students involved in promoting adherence to the school uniform?		

Considerations for working with students who are out of uniform	Yes	No or (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-religious • gender • pregnancy • disability • age • sexuality • transgender status • responsibilities as a carer. 		
<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>		
<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>		

Supporting Students to wear uniform	Yes	No or N/A
Does the student continue not to wear the school uniform?		
Have parents been fully informed that the student remains resistant to the wearing of school uniform despite the use of strategies to address this?		
Have copies of relevant documents, including notes, letters and statements been provided to the student and parents?		
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> .		
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?		
If yes to the previous question, has the meeting provided 'a fair hearing' - the opportunity for all parties to raise and explore relevant issues?		
If appropriate, has an interpreter or a support person been provided?		
Have issues been identified which could indicate the need for a long term exemption for the student?		
If yes to the previous question, has this been followed up with appropriate exemption processes?		
Have options been explored, and an option agreed upon by the student and parents that will result in an acceptable outcome?		

Where a resolution has not been achieved	Yes	No or N/A
Can the matter be resolved through discussion between parents, and the student if appropriate, and the relevant student support officer or school leader?		
If no, have the student and parents been reminded that they can formally lodge their objection as a suggestion or a complaint through the Directorate concerns and complaints process?		