

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

CHANGES TO DRESS STANDARDS AND UNIFORMS IN CANBERRA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

In Term 3, 2016 the ACT Government Education Directorate released the Dress Standards and Uniforms in Canberra Public Schools Policy, replacing the Dress Standards and Colour Codes in Public Schools (2010) policy. The new policy will require all Canberra public schools to create and implement their own uniform and dress standards in partnership with their school communities.

The new policy has been introduced in response to a 2014 survey that found Canberra parents are overwhelmingly in favour of seeing school uniforms in high schools. Under the changes, primary schools and high schools will be required to have a school uniform. High schools will also be required to offer their students the option of a formal-style school uniform.

All public primary schools currently have a uniform and the majority of public high schools currently have a uniform, with approximately half of the high schools also offering students a formal style uniform. The new policy will require changes for a small number of high schools, who will need to undertake a process with input from the school community to identify a formal uniform option. The purpose of the policy is to provide direction and advice to schools in developing and implementing school based student dress standards policy and procedures.

SUPPORTING STUDENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Schools Principals are able to make changes to uniform requirements for individual students to ensure student's health and wellbeing. Principals can grant individual students short and long term modifications and exemptions when the wearing of a uniform causes personal disadvantage outlined in anti-discrimination and human rights legislation, has implications for the student's health, or ability to comply with requirements relating to their ethno-religious background.

When creating a new uniform policy schools are required to consult with students, staff and parents/carers about the processes and procedures associated with the school based policy as well as consulting on the design of the uniform. Schools will also work with their school community to ensure that uniforms:

- > Are comfortable, hard-wearing and affordable for families
- > Provide adequate sun protection
- > Are suitable for all students regardless of gender identity, preferred presentation, ethnicity, religion, age, pregnancy or body shape
- > Are appropriate for students with disabilities
- > Are sourced from ethical producers
- > Comply with all health and safety, human rights and anti-discrimination laws.

BENEFITS OF UNIFORMS

School uniforms have been linked to creating a stronger sense of school identity, especially when developed in partnership with the school community. This stronger sense of identity has been linked in turn to improved student wellbeing. School uniforms have a number of other benefits, including:

- > Promoting a sense of belonging among students
- > Making school clothing more affordable for families and reducing perceived pressure for students to wear fashionable items
- > Promoting the safety of students through easier identification
- > Helping students to learn the importance of appropriate presentation.

COST OF UNIFORMS

Some parents and caregivers may be reluctant to support uniforms due to concerns about the initial costs. Under the new policy, school boards are required to consider the costs to families when designing a dress standards policy and uniform, and must inform school communities about how they will provide access to uniforms for families who may find it difficult to afford a uniform. This could include reducing costs to parents through approaches such as bulk purchasing, clothing pools, providing items for loan and a staged introduction of new uniform options.

MORE INFORMATION

The Dress Standards and Uniforms in Canberra Public Schools Policy, as well as the accompanying Procedures and Guideline are available on the Education Directorate's website:

http://www.education.act.gov.au/publications_and_policies/policy_a-z

If you have any questions or comments about the new policy please contact your school in the first instance. This will ensure you are provided with the most up-to-date information about the school's dress codes and uniform requirements.

Further information can be obtained by contacting your school Principal or the Directorate's Liaison Unit on (02) 6205 5429.