

Uniforming the uniform: An argument for a gender-neutral uniform policy

At the Yeo Park Infants School P&C meeting on 15th October 2014, a group of parents put forward arguments for the school to embrace a gender-neutral uniform policy.

We have summarised the arguments below and ask the uniform committee to consider adopting this policy. Specifically this would include removing the dress and skirt options from the uniform. The school uniform already includes gender-neutral hats, shorts, and shirts which enable students to effectively and equally participate in learning and physical activities without restriction.

This is not an argument that dresses and skirts / skirts are 'bad' or 'wrong' or a denial that students have free choice to wear whatever they want outside of school.

Schools are a safe place of belonging for children to learn, play, socialise, develop and grow. Children's ability to do this is enhanced when they are free from the usual gender expectations, roles, and constructs that society considers appropriate for boys and girls. Having this freedom within the school environment from a young age can only benefit children in their learning and socialising, particularly in their important first three years of school. Uniforms, as important visible symbols of identity, are an essential first step.

On a practical level, dresses and skirts reduce the ability of the wearers, almost exclusively girls, to move without restriction. Dresses require the wearer to negotiate how they sit, stand, play and how quickly they can move. More importantly they impose considerations of modesty and passivity which play into socially constructed gender roles for females eg: the importance to be 'nice, ladylike', 'pretty' vs strong, confident and active.

Some research in support of these views... The naturalisation of sex and gender is a reiterative practice (Butler 1993) which, through repetition and imitation, is sanctioned socially. Youdell (2005) conducted research into the performance of gender by girls in schools and examined how even girls' mundane practices contributed to conceptualizations of gender and how these were constricting. A research review by A Happel (2013) is published [here](#).

A gender-neutral uniform policy will also assist transgender and intersex children, estimated to be around 2% of the population, with their ability to thrive at school. Statistically, Yeo Park will have a transgender or intersex student in the future and could have one currently or have had one in the past. These children deserve to feel the same sense of belonging at school as every other child.

Every item in our uniform suite should be equally able to be worn by every child. We believe a fully inclusive uniform policy acknowledges gender diversity and builds on the school's anti-discrimination and non-bullying policies.

We attach with this letter a recent relevant [article published by The Guardian](#) (click link) last week on 21st Oct 2014. Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.

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