

GN 173 of 23 February 2006: National Guidelines on School Uniforms

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

I, Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, Minister of Education, after consultation with members of the Council of Education Ministers, hereby give notice in terms of Sections 8 (3) of the *South African Schools Act, 1996* (Act No. 84 of 1996), of the National Guidelines on School Uniform in the schedule which governing bodies must consider in determining school uniform for learners.

I further give notice in terms, section 7 of the *National Education Policy Act, 1996* (Act No 27 of 1996) that copies of the National Guidelines on School Uniform are obtainable from the Director-General, Department of Education, Private bag X895, Pretoria, 0001, for attention Mrs G Muleya at telephone (012) 312 5123 or fax (012) 325 4001.

(Signed)
GNM Pandor, MP
Minister of Education
Date: 3-02-2006

SCHEDULE

NATIONAL GUIDELINES ON SCHOOL UNIFORMS

INTRODUCTION

1. School uniforms serve important social and educational purposes, and should be retained in those public schools that choose to do so.
2. The purpose of these guidelines therefore is to ensure that practices related to school uniform do not impede access to education in any manner and do not infringe any constitutional rights of persons.
3. The guidelines also seek to reduce the cost of school uniforms, especially for the poor, such that the obtaining of a uniform does not deter attendance or participation in school programmes.
4. This aim will be best achieved by rationalising the current extensive range of uniform options, and limiting the number of uniforms required by a single school, and, where practical, discouraging the "single supplier" approach to school uniform.
5. Furthermore, in response to growing levels of violence in some of our schools, many parents, teachers, and school officials see school uniforms as one positive and creative way to reduce discipline problems and increase school safety.
6. The adoption of a school uniform can promote school safety, improve discipline, and enhance the learning environment. In addition a school uniform is also useful in:
 - (1) assisting school officials in the early recognition of persons not authorised to enter a school;
 - (2) helping parents and learners resist peer pressure that leads children to make unnecessary demands for particular and often expensive clothing;
 - (3) decreasing theft, particularly of designer clothing, jewellery and expensive footwear;
 - (4) minimising gang violence and activity;
 - (5) instilling discipline in learners; and
 - (6) helping learners concentrate on their schoolwork.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE GUIDELINES

7. Schools, through their School Governing Bodies, should determine their choice of school uniform in terms of these guidelines.
8. In exercising this choice, schools must ensure that access to education for pupils enrolled at the school or those seeking enrolment to the school is not impeded in any way.
9. The cost of the school uniform should not constitute an unaffordable financial burden on parents.
10. This choice can be exercised within a range of suggested options for schools, listed in the table below, in order to benefit from economies of scale and to limit the cost implications of a change of school.
11. The uniform must allow learners to participate in school activities with comfort, safety and decorum.
12. The range of school uniforms should be geared to reflect a South African identity. In this context the range of school uniforms should be as follows:

FOR BOYS	FOR GIRLS
ESSENTIAL ITEMS	ESSENTIAL ITEMS

Trousers (short or long) or tracksuit pants	Skirt, dress, gymslip or tunic or trousers (longs) or tracksuit pants
Shirt (button up or golf)	Shirt (button up or golf) or Blouse
OPTIONAL ITEMS	OPTIONAL ITEMS
Tie (school design)	Tie (school design)
Jersey or other suitable top for colder weather conditions	Jersey or other suitable top for colder weather conditions
Socks	Socks
Footwear e.g. shoes or sandals or "takkies"	Footwear e.g. shoes or sandals or "takkies"
Sunhat	Sunhat

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

13. Schools are discouraged from having more than one uniform. A basic school uniform could be adapted for local seasonal conditions, or for variations in weather and climate.
14. No child may be refused admission to a school because of an inability to obtain or wear the school uniform. Schools, through their School Governing Bodies, should make an effort to assist learners who are unable to afford a school uniform. The establishment of second-hand shops, run by schools, is therefore strongly encouraged.
15. Refusal to wear the approved school uniform may be treated as a disciplinary matter in terms of the Code of Conduct.
16. Individual interpretation and implementation of uniform specifications, particularly in respect of fabric, make and manufacturer should be allowed, within a reasonably flexible guideline.
17. Clothing for other purposes, such as physical education, arts and crafts, should be simple and universally available. Shorts, T-shirts (or golf-style shirts) and suitable footwear are all that is required for many activities. No child should be excluded from an activity because of an inability to obtain or wear such clothing, within the usual bounds of safety and decorum.
18. Where items of clothing are required in addition to the normal uniform, such as "First Team shirts", the school should endeavour to make such items available to learners selected to represent the school.
19. School Governing Bodies should take account of the circumstances of the school community, and be sensitive to them when designing a new school uniform.
20. Uniforms should show sensitivity to age and gender. Certain clothing and styles e.g. T-shirts and boxer shorts might be better suited to younger learners.
21. A "Proudly South African" approach should be promoted to stimulate local industry and assist in bridging the gap between the formal and informal economies.
22. The role that school uniforms can play in assisting unemployed people, especially rural people, gaining access to the economy needs to be explored. Persons participating in an Expanded Public Works Programme could, for instance, produce school uniforms, possibly through the establishment of co-operatives.

GUIDE TO ADOPTING A NEW OR AMENDED SCHOOL UNIFORM

23. School Governing Bodies intending to introduce a new or amended uniform should make their decision in terms of these guidelines.
24. Parents and other critical stakeholders should be involved or informed from the very outset, as their support will be critical to a successful adoption of the new uniform.

Suggested Process For Decision Making

25. The School Governing Body, working with the School Management Team, should communicate details of the proposed new or amended uniform to parents, including a statement that consideration has been given to the national guidelines in terms of range, style, colour and accessibility.
26. The communication to parents should also include:
 - (1) the estimated cost of the proposed uniform;
 - (2) an invitation to parents to make input before the final decision is taken;
 - (3) an invitation to learners in secondary schools to make input before the final decision is taken;
 - (4) the means by which the final decision to adopt the new or amended school uniform will be taken. This could be at the general meeting of parents that is held annually to approve the school budget or through some suitable form of ballot that would ensure maximum participation by parents.
 - (5) the transitional measures that will be taken to manage a smooth change over from the old to the new.

27. Major changes to school uniforms should not be made at intervals of less than seven years, unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise.

OTHER FACTORS AND ISSUES

28. A learner transferring from one school to another might require a period of grace to obtain the appropriate school uniform. Schools should be reasonable when dealing with requests of this nature. During this interim period the learner should be allowed to wear all or part of the uniform of the previous school.
29. The following information is provided to assist in determining a school uniform policy or dress code and in the management of school uniforms.

Religious and Cultural Diversity

- (1) A school uniform policy or dress code should take into account religious and cultural diversity within the community served by the school. Measures should be included to accommodate learners whose religious beliefs are compromised by a uniform requirement.
- (2) If wearing a particular attire, such as yarmulkes and headscarves, is part of the religious practice of learners or an obligation, schools should not, in terms of the Constitution, prohibit the wearing of such items. Male learners requesting to keep a beard as part of a religious practice may be required by the school to produce a letter from their religious teacher or organisation substantiating the validity of the request. The same substantiation is applicable to those who wish to wear a particular attire.

Freedom of Expression

- (3) The uniform policy of a school or dress code should accommodate the wearing of, for example, an HIV and AIDS ribbon or badges of approved charity organizations, especially for specific events or days. Such items should not contribute to disruption by substantially interfering with discipline or with the rights of others. Thus, for example, a uniform policy may prohibit pupils from wearing gang or political party insignia. A uniform policy may also prohibit items that undermine the integrity of the uniform, notwithstanding their expressive nature, such as a T-shirt that bears a vulgar message or covers or replaces the type of shirt required by the uniform.

School Mottos or Wearing of Messages

- (4) Schools should not impose a form of expression on pupils by requiring them to wear badges or items of uniform bearing a message that is in conflict with the Constitution or the Bill of Rights. School mottos that express positive values are encouraged.

School Uniforms as Part of an Overall Safety Programme

- (5) Uniforms by themselves cannot solve all of the problems of school discipline, but they can be one positive contributing factor to discipline and safety.
- (6) Schools should use other initiatives, in conjunction with uniforms, to address specific problems in their community such as truancy reduction initiatives, drug prevention efforts, community efforts to limit gangs, a zero tolerance policy on weapons, character building, and conflict resolution programmes.

Families That Need Financial Help

- (7) In many cases, school uniforms are less expensive than the clothing that learners typically wear in their leisure time. Nonetheless, the cost of purchasing a uniform may be a burden on some families. Schools, through their governing bodies, should make provisions for learners whose families are unable to afford uniforms and develop an assistance plan that takes into account the financial means of the school and its wider community.
- (8) Examples of possible types of assistance include:
- (a) the school, where feasible, provides new or second hand uniforms to learners whose parents cannot afford to purchase them;
 - (b) community organisations or businesses provide uniforms or contribute financial support for uniforms as part of a structured donor programme;
 - (c) parents work together to make uniforms available to indigent learners;
 - (d) second-hand uniforms donated by out-going learners are made available to incoming pupils on a charitable basis; and
 - (e) grants secured from a local foundation or bequests from deceased estates could cover the cost of uniforms for families that cannot afford to buy them.