

GENERAL NOTICE

NOTICE 641 OF 2005

Ministry of Education

CALL FOR COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL GUIDELINES ON SCHOOL UNIFORMS IN TERMS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT (SECTION 8(3)) AS PUBLISHED IN THE GOVERNMENT GAZETTE AND IN NATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

This document sets out guidelines for consideration by School Governing Bodies of public schools in determining school uniforms in terms of section 8 (1) of the South African Schools Act, which empowers them to maintain discipline in a school.

Therefore, I, Grace, Naledi Mandisa Pandor, Minister of Education, hereby in terms of section 3 (n) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (No.27 of 1996), and section 8 (3) of the South African Schools Act, 1996, request any person, society or organization to submit to me, by Wednesday, 15 June 2005, comments on the aforementioned draft document.

Comments should be forwarded to:

The Director General: Education
(For the attention of Mrs Lucy Moyane)
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Mrs GNM. Pandor, MP
Minister of Education
Date: 14-04-2005

CALL FOR COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT NATIONAL GUIDELINES ON
SCHOOL UNIFORMS IN TERMS OF SECTION 8(3) OF THE SOUTH
AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT, 1996 (Act No 84 of 1996)

DRAFT NATIONAL GUIDELINES ON SCHOOL UNIFORMS

INTRODUCTION:

1. School uniforms serve an important social purpose, and they should be retained in all public schools.
2. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that practices related to school uniforms 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 these school uniforms, especially for the poor, such that the obtaining of uniforms 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 institution, and by discouraging the "single supplier" approach to school uniforms.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE GUIDELINES

5. Schools will determine the final choice of school uniform, in terms of these guidelines.
6. In exercising this choice, schools must ensure that the individual or collective access to education of pupils enrolled at the school or those seeking enrolment to the school is not impeded in any way.
7. The cost of the school uniform must not constitute an unaffordable financial burden on parents.
8. This choice will be exercised within a restricted range of options as listed below in order to benefit from economies of scale, and to limit the cost implications of a change of school.
9. The uniform must allow pupils to participate in school activities with comfort, safety and decorum.
10. The range of school uniforms shall be geared to reflect a unique South African identity and to this end should include colours characteristic of Africa and also include items of clothing that are closely identified with Africa. In this context the range of school uniforms shall be as follows:

FOR BOYS	FOR GIRLS
ESSENTIAL ITEMS	ESSENTIAL ITEMS
Trousers (shorts, longs), tracksuit pants)	Skirt, dress, gymslip, tunic, trousers (longs), tracksuit pants
Shirt (African styled, button up, golf)	Shirt (African styled, button up, golf); Blouse
OPTIONAL ITEMS	OPTIONAL ITEMS
Tie (optional: school design)	Tie (optional: school design)
Jersey or other suitable "top" for weather conditions (optional)	Jersey or other suitable "top" for weather conditions (optional)
Socks (optional)	Socks (optional)
Footwear e.g. shoes or sandals or "takkies" (optional)	Footwear e.g. shoes or sandals or "takkies" (optional)
Sunhat (optional)	Sunhat (optional)

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- Schools are strongly discouraged from having more than one uniform, which are used for different occasions or at different times of the year. This is unnecessary and has no educational value.
- No child may be refused admission to a school because of an inability to obtain or wear the school uniform. Schools should make an effort to assist pupils who are unable to afford a school uniform, and the use of second-hand shops run by schools is strongly encouraged.
- Unwillingness to wear an approved school uniform must be treated as a disciplinary matter, in terms of the Code of Conduct.

14. A generous interpretation must be given to uniform specifications. The approved clothing should not have to be of a specified fabric, make or style, within reasonable limits.
15. Clothing for other purposes, such as physical education, arts and crafts, shall be simple and universally available. Shorts, T-shirts and suitable footwear are all that is required for most activities. No child should be excluded from an activity because of their inability to obtain or wear such clothing, within the usual bounds of safety and decorum.
16. Selection to a representative team of the school shall not require that the pupil obtain additional clothing at his or her own expense. Where a particular set of clothing is required, such as a "First X Strip", the school shall endeavour to make this available to pupils elected to represent the school.
17. Uniforms must take account of the circumstances of the school community, and be sensitive to these. Custom-designed ties and blazers will always be more expensive than generic styles, and should be discouraged. School badges can be attached to shirts using mechanisms like Velcro that allow shirts to be used for other schools.
18. Uniforms must be sensitive to age: certain clothing e.g. T-shirts is better suited to earlier years.
19. Schools must also be sensitive to climatic conditions. In warmer parts of the country, shorts and an open neck shirt with sandals must be preferred, instead of long trousers, tie and jacket. Pupils, especially in lower grades, should also be permitted to attend without shoes in hot weather.
20. A safe and disciplined learning environment is one of the first requirements of a good school. Young people who are safe and secure, who develop basic Constitutional values and the essentials of good citizenship, are better pupils.

21. In response to growing levels of violence in some of our schools, many parents, teachers, and school officials should see school uniforms as one positive and creative way to reduce discipline problems and increase school safety.
22. The adoption of a school uniform could promote school safety, improve discipline, and enhance the learning environment. The potential benefits of school uniforms include:
 - a. Decreasing violence and theft -- even life-threatening situations -- among pupils over designer clothing or expensive footwear;
 - b. Helping prevent gang members from wearing gang colours and insignia at school;
 - c. Instilling discipline in pupils;
 - d. Helping parents and pupils resist peer pressure;
 - e. Helping pupils concentrate on their school work; and
 - f. Helping school officials recognize intruders who come to the school.
23. A "Proudly South African" philosophy should be promoted. This could protect the local industry against cheap imports and would assist in bridging gaps between the formal and the informal economy.
24. The role that "school uniforms" could play in assisting unemployed (especially rural people) gaining access to the economy must be explored. It is envisioned that persons participating in an Expanded Public Works Programme could produce school uniforms. The skills they develop could form the basis of establishing co-operatives for the making a school uniforms. Appropriate adult education programmes would assist in setting these up along sustainable-business lines.

GUIDE TO ADOPTING A SCHOOL UNIFORM.

25. The decision to adopt a particular uniform is made by schools, in terms of these guidelines.
26. For uniforms to be a success, as with all other school initiatives, parents must be involved.

PROCESS FOR DECISION MAKING

27. The School Governing body should propose the uniform to parents, including a statement that they had considered the policy in terms of range, style, colour, accessibility in arriving at the uniform.
28. They should also indicate:
 - a. An estimate of the cost of the proposed uniform.
 - b. What process parents could use to decide? E.g. written ballot, show of hands, completion of return slips etc?
 - c. What role learners in secondary schools would play in the decision.
 - d. The final decision to adopt the school uniform would be taken in the meeting of parents that approves the school budget. Thus schools would ratify their uniforms at these meetings as choice of uniform has financial implications.
 - e. If a school wishes to change the uniform the decision making process needs to be repeated. The school governing body should also indicate the transitional measures that need to be taken to manage a smooth change over.
 - f. Learners transferring from a different school should be allowed a reasonable period of time to obtain the appropriate school uniform.

During this period such learners should be allowed to use the previous school's uniform. This should also apply to learners who have lost their uniform through e.g. theft, fire, accident (i.e. through no fault of their own)

INFORMATION TO ASSIST PARENTS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

29. The following information is provided to assist parents, teachers, and school leaders in determining whether or not to adopt a particular school uniform.

Get Parents Involved From The Beginning

- a. Parental support of a uniform is critical for success.
- b. Schools need to survey parents first to gauge support for school uniform requirements and then seek parental input in designing the uniform.
- c. Parent support is also essential in encouraging pupils to wear the uniform.

Protect Pupils' Religious Expression

- d. A school uniform policy must accommodate pupils whose religious beliefs are substantially burdened by a uniform requirement.
- e. When wearing particular attire, such as yarmulkes and headscarves, during the school day is part of pupils' religious practice; under the Constitution schools generally may not prohibit the wearing of such items.

Protect Pupils' Other Rights Of Expression

- f. A school's uniform policy may not prohibit pupils from wearing or displaying expressive items -- for example, an HIV and AIDS ribbon, or the logo of a charity organisation - so long as such items do not independently 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 a gang 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.

Do Not Require Pupils To Wear A Message

- g. Schools should not impose a form of expression on pupils by requiring them to wear uniforms bearing a substantive message which conflicts with the Constitution or the Bill of Rights.

Treat School Uniforms As Part Of An Overall Safety Programme

- h. Uniforms by themselves cannot solve all of the problems of school discipline, but they can be one positive contributing factor to discipline and safety.
- i. School may use other initiatives in conjunction with uniforms to address specific problems in their community e.g. truancy reduction initiatives, drug prevention efforts, community efforts to limit gangs, a zero tolerance policy for weapons, character building, and conflict resolution programs.
- j. Working with parents, teachers, pupils, and principals can make a uniform part of a strong overall safety program, one that is broadly supported in the community.

Assist Families That Need Financial Help

- k. In many cases, school uniforms are less expensive than the clothing that pupils typically wear to school. Nonetheless, the cost of purchasing a uniform may be a burden on some families. Schools with uniforms should make provisions for pupils whose families are unable to afford uniforms. Each school must develop an assistance plan for families that cannot afford to buy uniforms.
- l. Examples of the types of assistance include:
 - i. The school provides uniforms to pupils who cannot afford to purchase them ;
 - ii. Community and business leaders provide uniforms or contribute financial support for uniforms ;
 - iii. School parents work together to make uniforms available for economically disadvantaged pupils; and
 - iv. Used uniforms from out-going pupils are made available to incoming pupils on a charitable basis.
 - v. 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.