

## A Uniform Decision

14-year-old Tim dragged himself to school on a sweltering summer's day. It was barely 8:00 am and the weather was already punishing everybody under its harsh rays – a sure sign the rest of the day was to feel like a raging wildfire spitting white ashes into the sky. By the time Tim arrived at the crossing opposite his school, his uniform felt like someone had dumped a trash can full of water over it. *What I would give for someone to do that to me now*, he silently pleaded, as he crossed the road and entered the school. As he did, Tim noticed two Year 5 girls in singlets, shorts and thongs, cheerfully sashaying to the primary school next to his high school. He glumly stared down at his own outfit – long navy-blue pants, a long-sleeve navy-blue suit with a tie. "If only," Tim sighed, heading to the oval for his first class of the day.

Who would you rather be?

We all know we'd rather be the Year 5 girls, dressed for the hot, dry weather – not for a business conference. These are *students – kids* – we're talking about. They need to live a little, not roast to death because of some uniform policy that dresses them up like professional businessmen.

We all have different opinions on the issue of uniforms – some will say it creates a sense of belonging among students, others say it helps them work as a team and put aside their differences, and yet others believe students who wear uniforms do better academically. But do we see high academic performances when the heat is frying students' brains because of their thick, heat-attracting uniforms? Do we ever see students including one another because of their uniforms? Have we or will we ever see students accepting each other's differences *because* of their uniforms?

In theory, schools should be wonderful, diverse places, where everybody treats each other "how you would like to be treated", because of uniforms. In *reality*, however, that rarely ever happens, and when it does, was it because of the uniform? Imagine: *a girl walks up to a new student who nobody's talked to yet, flicking her blonde hair and putting on lipstick. Then she says, "Hey! I'm going to be your friend because our uniforms make us put aside our differences! It's, like, omigosh, totally cool..."*

But uniforms do not make students see that. They're young, they're still learning, they're not able to see past people's differences on their own. Not with uniforms, either.

A common idea associated with school uniforms is that they shun individuality and personal expression. These two factors are especially important during adolescence, as they are the 'outlets' a young person has to express how they feel inside, and how they identify themselves. Students who frequently wear dark colours may be reflecting their inner feelings to the world, and this may be a key indication to others that they may need someone to talk to, before those negative feelings turn their whole world upside down, through depression... or worse.

Shunning individuality isn't the only negative. Uniforms promote conformity – sound familiar? The idea that being different is a bad thing, that independence is a no-go in today's

society, that sameness is what should be aimed for in life. No thinking for yourself, making a different choice than everyone else. This can be seen already in students – when a teacher sends a student to the school library, for example, to get a book. The student then asks, “Can someone come with me?” The typical response we think girls do “naturally” might not be what we think it is. And, if it is, the promotion of conformity through school uniforms isn’t helping the case. Adults, parents, teachers – they want to see every child graduate as a positive, independent young adult. Yet uniforms seem to be the only fork in the road.

For a world so consumed with diversity and positive awareness, this is not the right way to go. Uniforms aren’t just a pain to wear in summer for some private school kids like Tim, they’ve also got a dark side to them. You decide: would schools be better, more expressive places if students chose what to wear... or would you prefer to see them walking to school in blank, emotionless uniforms? You be the judge of that.