

Pupils want an end to 'ugly' outdated uniforms

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Recently, pupils from Hoërskool Pretoria West demanded that skinny pants be incorporated into their school uniform. It was short-lived: their parents voted against their amendment to the school's dress code.

But should they be dismissed as teenagers seeking attention? Certainly not, say several high school pupils.

National guidelines say uniforms help parents and pupils to resist peer pressure, rendering "unnecessary [any] demands for particular and often expensive clothing". Instead,

uniforms are said to instil discipline and allow pupils to concentrate on schoolwork. But some pupils believe schools should move with the times.

"They need to incorporate the style of dressing that we identify with because we are in the 21st century. We are a different generation and things have long changed from the time of our parents. Our fathers wore the old, boring grey trousers; our brothers wore the grey trousers; we are still wearing it. It's depressing," said one pupil.

For some, their school uniform is "ugly" and affects their self-confidence. "When you are dressed in something that you do not like, you don't feel good; and with a school uniform it even makes you not to enjoy school because you are not comfortable in the clothes you are wearing," another said.

According to the guidelines, governing bodies should determine the school uniform, although high school pupils should be able to give their input before a final decision is made. But pupils said this was seldom the case, and occasionally bordered on discrimination.

"For example, at my school some gay learners used to wear skirts to school and they stopped them and told them to wear pants because they are boys. I feel that was wrong, because you had people who were comfortable with their sexuality and wanted to dress that way but were not allowed to," a pupil said.

The guidelines say that if pupils wear something that is not approved, they could face disciplinary action.

Professor Elda de Waal of North-West University said pupils must be guided to be responsible citizens able to debate matters. Therefore, schools shouldn't dismiss pupils' views but should also not give in to them.

"We must hear the learners' voices and not say: 'No, we have never done this before.' But listen and engage with them and their parents, who are the people who dig their hands in the pocket and buy school uniforms."