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## 'Let them wear shorts': Push for Perth's private schools to give girls more uniform options



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A Perth mum says she is "bewildered" her daughter must still wear skirts or dresses to her private school, despite a successful campaign to change WA's public school uniform policy last year.

Perth mum and advocate Lizz Clarke has taken up the fight to implement a new uniform policy amongst Perth's private educators, after year six student Sofia Myhre won the right to wear shorts to her government school through writing to Education Minister Sue Ellery last year.



While the group advocates changing private school uniform policy, it still acknowledges the need for uniforms. Photo: Tamara Voninski TVZ

While the 2017 policy change affected government schools, who are now compelled to offer a range of options, it did not affect Perth's private institutions.

Nearly four months on from the original change, the "Girls Uniform Agenda" has decided to push for the policy to extend to WA's private schools, and has begun collating information from schools to find out just where WA's schoolgirls don't have a choice.

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Preliminary research from the group indicated a disparity between Perth's north and south private institutions, with schools located in the southern suburb of Fremantle typically allowing girls to choose between skirts and shorts.

However, in Perth's northern suburbs, more than 40 per cent of surveyed schools did not offer an alternative option for their female students aside from a skirt or dress.

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"I'm bewildered to learn that some schools have no interest in my daughter attending if she doesn't wear a skirt or a dress," Ms Clarke said.

"Having worked around teens, I'm aware how difficult life at high school can be.

"I don't intend to make things worse by enforcing unfair uniform requirements that restrict my daughters comfort, movement and sense of self.

"It's interesting, I would hope that most people can recognise that a policy change in private school is in the best interests of the girls."

WAtoday understands a decision on private school girl's uniform policy is typically up to individual principals, but the Catholic Education Office remains mum on whether it supports or disapproves of any sort of change in WA's private schools.

When asked whether it would support any sort of policy revision in its schools, or why "uniform policy appropriate standards" exist for female students in CEWA schools, a spokeswoman said:

"Catholic Education Western Australia schools are committed to providing environments that best support learning, development and wellbeing for all students.

"CEWA schools set uniform policy appropriate for their student body, in consultation with the school board, parents and carers."

However, Ms Clarke said it's time the office, and its schools, realise the discussion is outdated.

"Many of the counter arguments for not addressing the disadvantage are minor obstacles or entrenched tradition.

"These have been successfully circumnavigated by other private schools in WA. All Saints, Guildford Grammar and Sacred Heart are currently leading the way with progressive modern and fair uniform options."

Guildford Grammar School, who will be co-educational for the first time this year, has already signed on to offer a variety of uniform options for its female students.

In summer, girls can wear a dress, or shorts and a short-sleeved shirt. In winter, girls can wear a blazer with a skirt or pants.

"It really was a pretty straightforward decision for us to provide the options. It made sense," headmaster Stephen Webber said.

A study by the University of Notre Dame Australia from nearly six years ago has previously indicated the need for change in school uniform policy.

"The school setting provides a unique opportunity to promote physical activity in children by ensuring adequate time, appropriate facilities and education guidance is offered.

"Mixed model analyses found that girls, but not boys, were significantly more active at recess when wearing their sports uniform compared to their winter uniform.

"School uniform did not impact the boy's physical activity levels.

"Perceived intensity of physical activity increased slightly among both girls and boys.

"A physically restrictive school uniform has the potential to inhibit physical activity among primary-school-aged girls."

Ms Clarke said while it was positive the change had been implemented in WA's public schools, and she expected push back from the state's religious institutions, she had a message for those who were negative about a possible change.

"I would ask them to question why it's important to them? What are your concerns? Can they be addressed? Are they relevant in 2018? Is it fair to the girls? What is more important?"