



# Girls' Uniform Agenda

## Uniform Change Handbook

Guidelines to negotiate the introduction of pants and shorts for girls at your school





# Outline

- 1 What is Girls' Uniform Agenda (GUA)**
- 2 Connecting with GUA**
- 3 Getting Started**
- 4 Writing a letter to your school**
- 5 Preparing for Your Meeting**
- 6 Education Department Policies**
- 7 Understanding State and Federal Legislation**
- 8 Negotiation Outcomes**
- 9 Next Steps**
- 10 Good Uniform Policy**
  - **Appendix 1**
  - **Appendix 2**
  - **Appendix 3**
  - **Appendix 4**



# 1 What is Girls' Uniform Agenda?

Girls' Uniform Agenda (GUA) was established in February 2017 by co-founders Dr Amanda Mergler (QLD) and Simone Cariss (VIC).

Parents and girls around Australia have been fighting school uniform battles for decades, particularly for the rights of girls to wear pants and shorts as part of their everyday uniform at school.

*The objective of Girls' Uniform Agenda is that **ALL** girls in **ALL** schools around Australia will have the choice of pants and shorts as part of their everyday school uniform options.*

Prior to 2017 our co-founders were independently negotiating with their daughter's schools in their respective states to allow pants and shorts for girls. These negotiations at local school level proved problematic for them both, resulting in the schools refusing to allow the girls choice of pants and shorts and damaging relationships in the process.





This theme is consistent around Australia for thousands of girls and their families across all sectors of government, independent and catholic schools, including primary and high schools. This is probably what has brought you here.

Simone and Amanda agreed that by working together, they would have a far greater impact at getting change across Australia for girls. As a result, Girls' Uniform Agenda was born.

Girls' Uniform Agenda has state representatives across Australia, including several Youth Activists. Email us and we will put you in contact with the appropriate state rep to assist you at a local level.

This handbook has been developed in response to demand from girls and parents who need assistance with how to get pants and shorts introduced at their school successfully.

Whilst every situation is different, this should give you the resources that you need to get started.

While not true in every case, it is our experience that you will be met with resistance to change so it is important to come prepared. This guide, although not exhaustive, should help you to be just that. Prepared.

*Pictured: Co-Founders Dr Amanda Mergler (left) and Simone Cariss (right)*



## 2 Connecting With GUA

**Website:** [www.girlsuniformagenda.org](http://www.girlsuniformagenda.org)

There are a range of resources on our website that you may find useful in addition to this document. So make sure you take a good look around on the site.

**Email:** [enquiries@girlsuniformagenda.org](mailto:enquiries@girlsuniformagenda.org)

Please get in touch via the above central email. We will put you in touch with your state-based representative.

**Social Media:**



[@girlsuniformagenda](https://www.facebook.com/girlsuniformagenda)



[@girlsagenda](https://twitter.com/girlsagenda)



[@girlsagenda](https://www.instagram.com/girlsagenda)



[@company/girls-uniform-agenda](https://www.linkedin.com/company/girls-uniform-agenda)





### 3 Getting Started

Thank you for being willing to work with your school to get change for girls in school uniforms. We are really grateful you are reaching out to us, and we are very pleased to be able to help you get pants and shorts for girls at your school.

*Deciding to take action is a really important first step.*

Setting up a meeting with the principal is a good idea to get the discussions started. You may have already done this and have started negotiations (or perhaps just been told no).

In some situations, taking your request to the school P&C or P&F might be a more suitable first step.

You may also wish to write a letter to your school or principal.

These steps will be outlined further in this package.



## 4 Letter Writing

### Writing a letter to your school:

For some parents, writing to their principal to explain their position before having an initial meeting may help. You can find a letter template to help you do this on our website here: <http://girlsuniformagenda.org/resources/information-sheets/>

Our templates are there to help you, but make sure you tell YOUR story.

*Discuss with your own family whether the letter should come from the student, the parent or both. Factors such as age of the child, confidence of the child and the level of resistance you are expecting should be considered.*

In your letter you may choose to leave it open with how to proceed next. Or you may decide to request a meeting straight up.



## 5 Preparing For Your Meeting

Preparation is key and it will pay to familiarize yourself with the common push backs you will likely encounter. We have put together several Appendices and other advice to get you prepared.



### *Arguments and Rebuttals – Appendix 1*

Read over and print out the '**Arguments and rebuttals**' section. This will give you a good heads up about all the arguments your principal might throw at you, and it will help you have answers ready. Be clear about your arguments before you start, and be calm and firm. Having the arguments printed in front of you while meeting with your principal is a good idea. We have provided a quick reference guide for each argument in Appendix 1. You can find the longer list of arguments and rebuttals on our website here: [Arguments-counter-arguments](#)



### *Infographic – Appendix 2*

Check out the reasons why we think shorts and pants for girls are necessary so that you have these arguments at hand. You can print out the **infographic** as a reminder.



### *Flowchart for change – Appendix 3*

Print the flowchart from our website that shows the process a school goes through to change its uniform. This may be slightly different for individual schools, but will give you a great understanding of how this is likely to go. You could discuss this process with the principal and encourage them to start the process to change, or add to the uniform.





### **Research – Appendix 4**

Take in some research articles that show that girls do more exercise in shorts, and that girls want to wear pants. We have included a summary and links to three excellent Australian studies.



### **Media**

Have some copies of media articles outlining why shorts and pants for girls are necessary. This can be helpful to show schools the potentially good media coverage that is possible for schools who offer choice. As well as the potentially damaging media attention for schools that refuse choice. Please browse [Our Media section](#) on our website to find articles relevant to you.



### **Uniform Supplier Details**

It might be helpful to have the names and contact details of one or two suppliers who already offer girls' shorts and pants. If the principal or P&C says that sourcing girls' shorts and pants can be difficult, you can help them by providing information around suppliers who can provide these options. There is no requirement that a school get ALL of its uniform options from the one supplier, and if your current supplier does not provide girls' shorts and pants options, you can encourage your school to investigate others who do. You will find uniform supplier information on the Girls' Uniform Agenda website here: <http://girlsuniformagenda.org/uniform-suppliers-provide-pants-shorts-girls/>



## 6 Department of Education Policy

Be sure to have the appropriate state education department policy with you. The links for each state are below.



<http://bit.ly/ACTpolicy>



<http://bit.ly/NSWpolicy>



<http://bit.ly/NTpolicy>



<http://bit.ly/QLDpolicy>



<http://bit.ly/SApolicy>



<http://bit.ly/TASpolicy>



<http://bit.ly/VICpolicy>



<http://bit.ly/WAedpolicy>

Discuss with your principal the fact that the tide is shifting in regard to policy changes within state education departments.

*GUA has successfully lobbied various state and territory education departments to review their school uniform policies to ensure girls are offered the choice of pants and shorts.*

Our understanding is that state education policies only apply to public schools. If you are seeking change in the independent and catholic sectors this is still evidence that the expectation of modern society is that girls should be offered pants and shorts at school. At the time of writing, a number of states have updated their policy to include shorts and pants for girls including WA, VIC, NSW and QLD.

We have undertaken research in SA, NT and ACT and it seems the Education Department policy in each of those states are adequate with excellent compliance amongst public schools. GUA was involved in establishing some guidelines in the ACT to inform schools of their obligations.

Tasmania still requires Department of Education policy change to fall in line with the other states and to comply with Tasmanian anti-discrimination laws.

Point out that if the school doesn't make this change voluntarily, they may be ultimately forced to. It is always better to be proactive than reactive in situations like these.

## Promoting schools who do the right thing

Point out that if the school does make this change voluntarily GUA would love to feature the school as an awesome school supporting the rights of girls. Some good media articles to print out and give to your principal and P&C/P&F/school council about these changes are here:

- WA - <https://www.perthnow.com.au/news/wa/perth-girl-wins-school-campaign-for-choice-of-pants-shorts-or-skirts-ng-e942c3f6d9fd197ed0964640b3fad4e5>
- VIC - <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/girls-win-right-to-wear-shorts-and-trousers-to-all-victorian-state-schools-20170912-gyfwf9.html>





## 7 Understanding State and Federal Legislation

In many cases school uniform issues will be resolved before having to consider the legal angle of whether your school is discriminating against you, or your daughter. If you do find your family in a position where you feel like all the usual avenues for negotiation within the school environment are exhausted this section will be important for you.

The legislation is central to understanding your rights and it may shape your ability to negotiate effectively with your school when things have hit a stalemate. The legislation varies in each state; however, all states are also covered under the Sex Discrimination Act federally.

You can, and should, educate yourself about both state and federal legislation.

Whilst we would encourage you to seek your own independent legal advice if you feel you are being discriminated against, GUA has sought clarification on the legislation and will provide a general overview.

Based on our understanding of the legislation:

*Where a school implements and enforces a school uniform policy that requires female students to wear dresses or skirts to school and prohibits them from wearing pants or shorts (a "gendered uniform policy"), that school's educational authority is, subject to exceptions in some States, engaging in unlawful discrimination.*

## Important points:

- Sex (or gender) is a protected attribute in all jurisdictions (all states and territories). This means that it is unlawful for an educational authority to treat a student less favourably because that student is of a particular gender.
- To establish discrimination under the anti-discrimination regimes of each jurisdiction, it must be demonstrated that a gendered uniform policy results in female students being treated less favourably than males.

For example:

- Physical activity restrictions
- Impacts on everyday movement, comfort and modesty
- Psychological effects

## Exemptions

Unfortunately, in some parts of Australia there are exemptions to anti-discrimination laws. This is important to understand as in some cases this can limit your capacity to make a discrimination claim under the state anti-discrimination laws.

In New South Wales there is a broad legislative exemption applicable to non-government schools. Under this exemption, private educational institutions are exempt from the unlawful discrimination provisions of the NSW regime, meaning that a private school which enforces a gendered uniform policy will NOT be engaging in unlawful discrimination.

There is an exception in Victoria which states that an educational authority will NOT be engaging in unlawful discriminatory conduct where it is setting and enforcing *reasonable* standards of dress and appearance. Under this exception, a school uniform policy must be taken to be reasonable where the educational authority has taken into account the views of the school community in setting the policy. This means that where a school's community is of the view that a gendered uniform policy is acceptable, the educational authority will not be engaging in unlawful discriminatory conduct. The school would need to demonstrate that they have consulted the school community adequately to have come to this view.

Because of these exemptions, affected students in these States could pursue their claims under the Federal legislation (where no such exemptions exist).

Please visit the relevant state based information provided on our website here: <http://girlsuniformagenda.org/resources/legislation/>

## Summary of Anti-Discrimination Laws for Girls Denied the Choice of Pants and Shorts at School

<i>Jurisdiction</i>	<i>Do anti-discrimination laws apply?</i>	<i>Is there direct discrimination?</i>	<i>Is there indirect discrimination?</i>	<i>Are there any applicable exceptions/ exemptions</i>
<b><i>Australian Capital Territory</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b><i>New South Wales</i></b>	Yes	Yes (for government schools only)	Yes (in coeducational government schools only)	Yes
<b><i>Northern Territory</i></b>	Yes	Yes	No (no provision in legislation)	No
<b><i>Queensland</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes (in coeducational schools only)	No
<b><i>South Australia</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes (in coeducational schools only)	No
<b><i>Tasmania</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b><i>Victoria</i></b>	Yes	Yes (unless the school community is of the view that the gendered uniform policy is reasonable)	Yes (unless the school community is of the view that the gendered uniform policy is reasonable)	Yes
<b><i>Western Australia</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes (in coeducational schools only)	No
<b><i>COMMONWEALTH</i></b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No





## 8 Negotiation Outcomes

### Positive outcome:

If it turns out that the principal is on side, it is a much easier journey. Please see **Appendix 3** for a step by step guide to the introduction of shorts and pants for girls. Many of the education department policies recommend or require community consultation, so most schools will want to survey the school community. Schools should prioritise consultation with girls about the style, fit, fabric choices etc for the new uniform items so that they introduce options that girls actually want to wear. You will find suggested survey questions for female students, parents, teachers and P&C members on our website here:

<http://girlsuniformagenda.org/surveys/>

Remember that the surveys are just a guide, and you and your school should alter them to suit your school's circumstances.

Section 10 of this guide explores what a good uniform policy looks like and the do's and don'ts of implementation.

### Negative outcome:

If the principal is not on side, it will be difficult. If you have a tough P&C who are on your side, and are willing to stand up to the principal, you may be able to get change through. However, sometimes it is the P&C itself who will provide the push back.

The principal will probably want to run any proposed changes by the community – this shouldn't be a lengthy process however, it is often used as a stalling tactic. Consultation can be done via a survey to students and parents. Do be aware if they go with a survey, they should be genuinely consulting on the choices that girls want, including pant and shorts options that girls actually want to wear.

A survey might help your school determine what style of shorts and pants girls want, and what fabric and colours would be most acceptable.



## 9 Next Steps

### Writing to the Education Minister and Education Department

If you feel that the meeting with your principal/P&C/P&F/school council was not successful, and that they are unlikely to make any change to the school uniform policy, we suggest you write to the Education Minister in your state. You should also write to the Education Department in your state. This is valuable for both public and private schools, as these organisations need to know that people are unhappy with both systems.

Be sure to point out the steps you have already taken to try and achieve change at your school, and the areas of the departments' policy that you feel the school is failing to follow. Request the Minister and the Education Department intervene and request a reply. For independent and catholic schools, whilst the Department of Education will say that those schools make their own decisions, they are recipients of public funding, so ask for help in getting this resolved. It is also a good idea to request a meeting with the Minister and the Education Department.

You can find letter templates to help you draft a letter to the minister on our website here: <http://girlsuniformagenda.org/resources/letters-for-ministers/>

# Lodging a complaint with the Anti-Discrimination Commission

If you do not feel that any change will occur from writing to the Education Minister and the Education Department, and particularly if your school is a private school, you could consider taking your school to the anti-discrimination commission in your state (apart from NSW).

Girls' Uniform Agenda can provide ongoing support with this process, and you can find an explanation of how this process works, and contact details for the Commission in each state, on our website here: <http://girlsuniformagenda.org/resources/anti-discrimination-bodies-state/>

## *The Complaints Process Overview*

Each jurisdiction (state or territory) has its own mechanisms in place for the making and resolving of discrimination complaints, with these mechanisms being broadly similar across the States and Territories.

In the **States and Territories** this usually involves engaging in one or more of the following steps until the complaint is resolved (or dismissed):

- a) lodgement of the complaint with the relevant State anti-discrimination commission;
- b) investigation and conciliation of the complaint by the relevant State anti-discrimination commission;
- c) (if necessary) a tribunal hearing (where a decision that is binding on all parties can be obtained); and
- d) (if necessary) appeal of the tribunal decision to the Supreme Court.

The **Commonwealth** regime involves engaging in one or more of the following steps until the complaint is resolved (or dismissed):

- a) lodgement of the complaint with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC);
- b) investigation and conciliation of the complaint by AHRC;
- c) (if necessary) lodgement of the complaint with the Federal Court or Federal Circuit Court;
- d) (if necessary) a court hearing (where a decision that is binding on all parties can be obtained); and
- e) (if necessary) appeal of a court decision to a higher court.

While a person can elect whether to make a discrimination complaint in respect of a gendered school uniform under either the Commonwealth or State/Territory-based regimes, it may be preferable for students (apart from NSW students attending an independent school) to make their complaints under their respective State/Territory regime. This is because under the State/Territory-based regimes, a person does not need to go to court in order to obtain a decision which is binding on the parties, meaning that this approach is likely to be more cost-effective.





## 10 Good Uniform Policy

### What makes a good uniform policy?

Each school will come to their own conclusions about what is right for their school in terms of uniform. Some schools will have a relaxed approach with a school polo top and coloured shorts and pants of your own choosing. Other schools have a much more formal approach and every item must be purchased from the school uniform shop with the school logo. Whatever approach is taken at your school there are some important points to consider for all schools.

In our experience, some schools like to take short cuts or fail to see the barriers they are putting in front of girls in having real choice. For example, some schools don't announce to the school community that pants and shorts are being introduced. This leaves the girl(s) who have asked for the change being singled out. Schools often don't ask the girls what kind of pants and shorts they would be comfortable in, with schools sometimes choosing a terrible option that they know girls won't wear. Schools 'forget' to update their uniform ordering lists or their policies – this leaves girls confused about whether pants and shorts are really accepted options. Some schools 'allow' pants and shorts for girls but then have rules requiring girls to wear the dress, skirt or tunic for formal occasions. This is an additional expense for families and sends the wrong message to girls.

The uniform review process is a great opportunity to get some crucial things right.

On the following page you will find a list of *Do's* and *Don'ts* when introducing pants and shorts for girls.

## DO'S



Do consult with girls about the cut and style of the new uniform options.



Select pants and shorts options that are a suitable cut for girls.



Give options: all students should be able to choose from the uniform options available.



Ensure stock is available or lead time is not excessive. Many schools have successfully negotiated smaller orders. Shop around with suppliers.



Make an announcement regarding the introduction of pants and shorts for girls. Tell girls about the benefits.



Take photos of girls wearing pants and shorts and use them in your marketing materials and website.



Update school uniform policies, ordering lists and display all options in uniform shops. Ensure staff/volunteers know of the changes and allow students to choose freely.



Do make it clear that the pants and shorts options are part of the standard school uniform and are acceptable for both girls and boys.

## DON'TS



Don't introduce a poorly considered option that you know girls will not want to wear.



Don't simply remove the labels from the boys' uniform.



Don't force girls to purchase the dress/skirt/tunic for special occasions.



Don't make it difficult for girls to order the pants and shorts.



Don't introduce pants and shorts for girls and then not tell anyone about the change.



Don't use photos of girls in dresses and skirts only in your uniform policy. Include all options.



Don't forget to update your website and other internal documents and policies.



Don't say or document that the dress/skirt/tunic are the preferred uniform option. All options should be acceptable for all occasions.

## APPENDIX 1: ARGUMENTS AND REBUTTALS

In the struggle for girls' rights, you are bound to come across people who argue against your position. Girls' Uniform Agenda have heard a number of arguments as to why girls should not be offered the choice of shorts and pants at school, and we felt it would be helpful to list these arguments here.

**Argument:** *We all have to dress in ways we don't want to sometimes.*

**Rebuttal:** Do we? While workplaces or other establishments might require a certain standard of dress or specific items for safety, uniforms or dress codes must abide by anti-discrimination legislation. A workplace uniform or dress code can not legally require a female to wear a dress or skirt.

Just like women, children should not have to dress in a way that restricts their ability to do what they need or want to do. We believe that girls school uniforms must follow anti-discrimination legislation, and allow girls the choice. to choose between dresses/skirts and shorts and pants.

**Argument:** *Let's focus on the learning time and not the 40 minutes of play time in the school day.*

**Rebuttal:** Wearing a dress can impact on learning time. In primary school classrooms, students often spend a good amount of their day on the floor, whether it be sitting and listening to a teacher reading a story, using Lego to help with counting, or programming and playing with robots during robotics. Sitting on the floor in a dress or a skirt can be hard to do modestly. It is harder to engage in these activities fully when you are continually worried about flashing your underwear.

In secondary school, learning is made more difficult when wearing skirts and dresses during agriculture, when out gardening, while sitting up on stools in science class, and in many other activities that occur for students during their school day, including the simple act of walking between classrooms including staircases. Reaching to write on a board while wearing a skirt or dress can be hard to do modestly. We have heard from teachers who notice that girls are less inclined to volunteer to write on the board while wearing a dress or a skirt.

**Argument:** *The girls are running around and playing. The dress is not stopping them.*

**Rebuttal:** Many girls say that wearing a dress **DOES** stop them from playing, doing exercise and having fun. This has been documented anecdotally, and in a number of recent Australian studies. We should listen to girls, respect their voices, and believe them.

**Argument:** *Girls want to wear dresses.*

**Rebuttal:** Some girls do want to wear dresses, and should be allowed to do so. However, many girls do not want to wear dresses, and they should be allowed to wear shorts and pants. A survey conducted in one Brisbane primary school showed that 55% of the girls from Grades 4, 5, and 6 did not like the dress they were required to wear, and 81% said they would choose to wear shorts or skort and a shirt if this option was available.

**Argument:** *We will have too many uniform items in the school & that won't look good. It will undermine our image.*

**Rebuttal:** Many schools offer girls options of skort, shorts, culottes, pants, and dresses. They have not reported that their school looks shabby. Having a range of options made in similar material allows the 'uniform' look of students to remain. Schools also monitor the wearing of the uniform to ensure students are complying with the dress code. In addition, where schools are reluctant to offer more options, they can simplify their uniform by allowing the sports uniform of shorts and polo shirt to become acceptable everyday wear for all students.



**Argument:** Adding shorts and long pants for girls will increase the cost for families.

**Rebuttal:** When unisex uniforms are available, and girls and boys wear the same shorts, for example, this allows a cost saving for families with children of both genders, as they can simply pass these items down. Furthermore, a range of suitable uniform options means that families can choose what they purchase, allowing them to factor the cost into their choice.

Throughout our extensive research on school uniform policies we have seen in the vast majority of schools that the girls winter tunic/dress is more expensive than the boys pants so introducing pants for girls will be more cost effective for families should they choose that option.

Schools however should not require girls to wear the dress or skirt for special occasions as this will disadvantage those students and add additional costs for families for girls who would never otherwise wear the skirt or dress.

**Argument:** If you don't like the school's uniform policy, leave this school and go somewhere else with a policy more aligned to what you want.

**Rebuttal:** All families should have the option of choosing their local school as their school preference. For many families, they live within walking distance to their local school. Why should a student have to disrupt their education and move schools, away from their established social networks, because a school refuses to offer girls choice?

For many families around the country it is not a simple process to change schools. Limited choice for rural families may mean there is no option to move elsewhere. For inner city and suburban areas it is common for schools to be zoned and access to be denied unless in the zone. The issue of access to shorts and pants for girls is spread across private, religious and public schools. In some areas, a family can find that all schools around them DO NOT offer girls the choice of shorts and pants. In cases such as these, moving schools will not solve the problem.

**Argument:** We must retain the formal dress as the formal uniform, as girls look smarter in dresses.

**Rebuttal:** Girls can look smart in shorts or pants and blouse options. A number of schools allow girls to wear shorts, pants and shirts as their formal uniform, and they look very smart in these. Boys in shorts and pants look smart in their uniforms, as do female teachers within the school that wear pants to work. We should not prioritise how a girl looks over how she is able to function.

**Argument:** The school needs to have a good amount of take-up on shorts and pants for girls to make the production costs to the school uniform supplier viable.

**Rebuttal:** In one Brisbane school, 81% of the girls said that they wanted and would wear shorts and pants if this option was available. Further, many girls have noted anecdotally and via research that they want to wear shorts and pants to school. For these reasons, we don't anticipate take-up will be a problem.

Schools should make it a priority to consult with girls to choose the best option that will result in the best uptake. Too often we see schools introduce options that are a poor fit or style that girls naturally will not want to wear.

**Argument:** Let's ask the school community what they think, and if they don't want girls to have shorts and pants as part of their every day school uniform, then we can leave things the way they are.

**Rebuttal:** Parents and girls who ask for shorts and long pants to be added to the uniform for girls should be met with support and an agreement to work toward implementing their request. In most states regardless of what a school community thinks, this right is protected for girls under anti-discrimination legislation and, in the case of state schools, state education department policies. Where schools are not providing girls with the option of shorts and pants as part of their every day school uniform, they are discriminating against and disadvantaging girls.

**Argument:** *How ridiculous, next you'll want the boys to wear dresses.*

**Rebuttal:** Girls' Uniform Agenda believes that all children, regardless of their gender, should be allowed to choose from the range of uniform options. Research clearly shows that girls are disadvantaged by being required to wear a dress or a skirt. We are working to remove this disadvantage. Boys, already able to wear pants and shorts, are not disadvantaged in this way, and are therefore not the focus of this campaign.

**Argument:** *You are trying to make all children look the same, as if they have no gender.*

**Rebuttal:** We advocate for appropriate options for girls, which means providing girls' pants and girls' shorts. Many schools suggest that if girls don't want to wear a dress they can wear the boys' uniform. However, in general, girls do not want to wear the boys' uniform, as they do not identify as boys, do not wear boys' clothes outside of school and do not want to be perceived as doing something unusual. Girls wearing pants and shorts to school is not an issue about gender identity, it is an issue about discrimination and disadvantage. Girls should not have to dress like boys in order to be able to participate in the same way as boys.

**Argument:** *You are raising brats who will be anti-authority.*

**Rebuttal:** There is no evidence indicating a choice between trousers and skirts increases the likelihood of children exhibiting anti-authority attitudes or behaviour. To the contrary, comfort in school wear will enable children to focus more in lessons, fidget less, and be distracted less. Raising children who have a strong sense of justice and a commitment to equality is key to making positive gains in outcomes for women and girls in our society. Raising children who believe they must always do as they are told will just maintain the status quo, and our society will never move forward.

**Argument:** *I had to wear it and I'm fine. Toughen up.*

**Rebuttal:** Anecdotal evidence does not trump methodical research on a topic. To suggest you turned out fine is to dismiss the experience of those who are not happy being forced to wear a dress or a skirt. You might not have minded wearing a skirt or dress, but for some girls it is genuinely distressing, and for many girls it is annoying, uncomfortable, impractical and prevents them from doing things they'd like to do. The research supports the position that wearing a dress or skirt to school disadvantages a girl. Being disadvantaged is not something girls should just have to put up with.

## Appendix 2: Infographic

### WHY SHOULD GIRLS HAVE CHOICE OF PANTS AND SHORTS AS PART OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS?



#### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Research shows that when girls are in dresses and skirts they exercise less than when wearing shorts and pants. Being active should be encouraged whenever possible - not just on sports days.

#### LEARNING

Sitting cross legged on the floor for many class activities is hindered for girls in dresses. Let girls focus on their learning - rather than worrying about the length of their skirts, whether anyone can see their underwear and freezing in winter.



#### MODESTY

The wearing of skirts does not protect girls from the accidental public display of their underwear. Additionally many girls stop cartwheeling and playing on the monkey bars at school due to modesty concerns.

#### GENDER STEREOTYPES

Rigid gender stereotypes are damaging - to girls & boys. From the time children begin school they are shown that girls look and behave in a particular way (proper) and boys look and behave in a manner that allows them more freedom.



#### LEGAL RISK

Requiring girls to wear skirts and dresses to school, whilst also preventing them from wearing shorts & trousers is discriminatory, and is a rule not applied to their male peers. Schools are at risk of being sued under anti-discrimination legislation.

#### SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

It's not the 1950's anymore. Female nurses, teachers and police officers all have choices in their uniform options today and dresses are seen as largely impractical. The wearing of dresses and skirts is no longer an expectation of women in society - so why do we continue to force this archaic stereotype on school girls?

[www.girlsuniformagenda.org](http://www.girlsuniformagenda.org)



## Appendix 3:

# STEP BY STEP GUIDE TO GETTING PANTS & SHORTS INTRODUCED AT SCHOOL



### RAISE THE ISSUE

Raise the issue of shorts and pants for girls at a P&C / P&F / School Council meeting, or directly with the school leadership team or principal if appropriate.

### GET AGREEMENT

With the various resources GUA has armed you with, aim to get agreement from the Principal / P&C / P&F / School Council that the school can explore additional uniform options for girls. The school may want to create a uniform committee. Ensure you are on this committee.

### IF AGREEMENT IS NOT REACHED

contact GUA for support:  
[enquiries@girlsuniformagenda.org](mailto:enquiries@girlsuniformagenda.org)

We can advise what your next steps might be. Your options may include making a formal complaint to the Equal Opportunity Commission in your state or making a complaint under the Sex Discrimination Act.

### UNIFORM SUPPLIERS

Meet with your current uniform provider, and talk through what shorts and pants options they currently have for girls.

If your current provider has a range of options, ask them to bring samples into your school and look them over.

If they do not have any/many, ask them to source girls' shorts and pants from the wider school uniform market, and report back to you on their findings.

### CONSULT

Allow the girls to try on these samples and discuss their preferences.

If your provider cannot come back to you with additional options, seek out new providers who do offer girls' shorts and pants options.

Consider any design changes the girls may like and discuss whether these can be done with the uniform supplier. Most uniform suppliers can make changes.

Discuss with the provider the logistics for adding new options: eg: how many of each option will you need to buy or stock? How long will it take to make any changes suggested by the girls? How soon can the new options be offered across the whole school?

Contact one or two of these providers and ask them to come to your school with samples.

### VOTE AND IMPLEMENT

Take samples (or photos) of the girls' shorts and pants choices back to the P&C / P&F / School Council and share the information around implementation timeframes.

At this meeting, vote to ensure the new options will be implemented across the school. Get clear agreement around when the new options will be available for girls. Monitor progress with the uniform supplier around meeting these deadlines. Communicate changes broadly within your school community.



## Appendix 4: Australian research studies examining girls' school uniforms

### Article 1: Incidental physical activity

Norrish, H., Farringdon, F., Bulsara, M., & Hands, B. (2012). The effect of school uniform on incidental physical activity among 10-year old children. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*, 3(1), 51-63.

An Australian study that recorded the number of steps undertaken by primary school girls and boys over a one month period. For two weeks the students wore their formal uniform (dress for girls, shorts for boys), and for two weeks they wore their sports uniform (shorts for both genders). The results showed that only the girls' physical activity levels were affected by the type of uniform they wore, with girls doing significantly less exercise when wearing a dress than when wearing the shorts. The authors state that: "A physically restrictive school uniform has the potential to inhibit physical activity among primary-school-aged girls" (p. 51).

Download for free here:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232710037\\_The\\_effect\\_of\\_school\\_uniform\\_on\\_incidental\\_physical\\_activity\\_among\\_10-year-old\\_children](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232710037_The_effect_of_school_uniform_on_incidental_physical_activity_among_10-year-old_children)

### Article 2: Voices in the Playground

Stanley, R.M., Boshoff, K., & Dollman, J. (2012). Voices in the playground: a qualitative exploration of the barriers and facilitators of lunchtime play. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 15(1), 44-51.

This Australian study explored children's perceptions of the factors that impact on their ability to engage in lunchtime play at school. Ten to 13 year old girls reported that their uniform was a factor (boys did not mention uniform). When girls were asked why they chose certain activities over others, uniform was identified as a significant restriction to playing certain types of activities, such as basketball. One girl commented that "uniforms cut you back from running and stuff" (p. 47).

Download for free here: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2144&context=sspapers>

### Article 3: Physical Activity Barriers

Watson, A., Elliott, J., & Mehta, K. (2015). Perceived barriers and facilitators to participation in physical activity during the school lunch break for girls aged 12 - 13 years. *European Physical Education Review*, 21(2), 257-271.

This Australian study reported on focus group discussions with girls from two South Australian co-educational primary schools (aged 12 to 13 years). The children were asked what they thought was the most important facilitator and barrier to engaging in physical activity during their lunch times. A key theme that the girls identified as a barrier to their participation was the gendered school uniform. The researchers write that, "most girls acknowledged the restrictive nature of dresses and skirts when engaging in physical activity, stating that clothing more appropriate for physical activity would encourage participation. The girls also recognized the gendered nature of the school uniform, making it easier for boys to be active" (p. 261).

Download for free here:

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.876.1699&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

## This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

**Dr Amanda Mergler, Simone Cariss and Amy Blain – Directors of Girls' Uniform Agenda and all the GUA team Australia wide.**

