

CHAPTER 4 GREEN AND GOLD

'Clothes maketh the Man' or should that be 'Maketh the Person'? To wear or not to wear school uniform is not so much an issue these days as it may have been in the 1970's - but then popular opinion about school uniform has gone through periods of complete rejection, ambivalence and avid support. The idea of children wearing a costume which identified them with their school (much as livery identified the retainers of families of the nobility) was, like so much in Australian schools, an import from Britain.

Before the era of public education in Britain, schools were founded and maintained privately, some for hundreds of years. Charitable groups, as well as religious groups, took great pride in their schools and selected their scholars with great care. It was deemed desirable that the scholars should be known to be members of the school so they were often required to wear some identifying piece of clothing. It seems likely that the name of the famous Bluecoats School in London derived from this practice. It is interesting that while school uniform seems to enjoying a comeback in Australia, many British schools (both public and private) have long abandoned uniforms.

There is a belief that the wearing of uniform engenders pride in the school in the hearts of the students - or maybe it is the hearts and minds of parents which feel the pride? Nevertheless, school uniform has always been seen as a 'leveller', blurring the distinctions between children from wealthy or poor backgrounds, setting them all on an

equal footing, in appearance at least.

Certainly when a lot of South Australian schools abandoned uniform in the 1970's, a certain competitiveness in dress crept into schools. You had to have the 'right' jeans, the 'flares' had to be so wide and you were really square if you wore a mixture of uniform and casual clothes. Children who paraded in the schoolyard in 'the latest' were envied. Fashion had entered the world of children's clothes!

School uniforms had remained much the same in Port Pirie for 60 years or more. When Port Pirie High School was founded in 1910, the girls' uniform consisted of a three box pleated serge tunic, a long-sleeved blouse, school tie and blazer with the school crest on the pocket. The boys wore grey worsted trousers (short or long depending on age), with their long sleeved shirt, school tie and blazer. Lace-up leather shoes completed the outfit for both girls and boys.

No concessions seem to have been made to the local weather conditions, and students continued to wear their heavy shoes and their ties even when the temperature soared to over 100°F! So much for tradition!

When Risdon Park School was opened in 1955, the mothers were keen to establish a uniform for the school. No time was lost as the headmaster records:

April 5 The Welfare Club decided on a green and grey uniform...

We gather that the question of what was an appropriate uniform generated as

much discussion at that time as it does today. The final decision was that the girls would wear a grey 3-box pleat tunic and the boys would have grey shorts. This was very much in keeping with the era.

The School Inspector noted in his June 1956 Report:

The introduction of a school uniform some time ago has been well-received and the growing number of children who come to school in uniform shows that they take a pride in their school.

Green and gold became the colours for netball uniforms. These school colours remain to this day, and children take a particular pride in knowing that these are Australia's colours too.

That the original school uniform persisted into the 1970's suggests that the dreaded box-pleat tunic must have had something to recommend it. Indeed the tunic did allow for growth (upwards as well as outwards!). It could accommodate girls of all shapes and sizes. Many parents bought a largish size to start with. A wide hem was



A new style summer uniform for girls has been adopted at the Risdon Primary School. Pictured modelling the new look uniform are from left, Judith McKinnon, Leonie Chappell and Bronwyn Whelan.

turned up, and, with a big tuck on the shoulders, the garment lasted for years!

Also in the pre-1970's era, the girls were allowed to wear a summer dress. Some girls recall a nylon garment that was quite light (probably white) with some sort of green stripe. Its main claim to fame was that it had a tendency to become quite scratchy and was very hot in the summer! In those days, summer uniform was worn in Terms 1 and 3, while the winter uniform was restricted to Term 2. Sandals were definitely not considered appropriate for school, and leather lace-ups were worn all year round.

During the 70's and 80's, the philosophy of personal freedom and individual rights was popularised. It was 'Do your own thing' and 'Me'. There



*Mid-year intake 1967
Mrs. Maureen Bairstow
and son Dean*



*Paula Bairstow and Jan
Edwards, sports uniform
1970*

was a belief abroad that dressing children in uniform (as well as having them march and sit up straight) was bad for children and crushed their individualism. 'Down with regimentation' was the cry!

While most people may have not espoused the anti-authority belief wholeheartedly, the general notion of a more relaxed way of living, and of bringing up children, was widespread.

Dress trends were changing, and the Risdon Park Primary School Welfare Club looked to updating the school uniform to make it more in keeping with the times.

Various items had been added to the original uniform over the years; a grey jumper with green and gold bands on the sleeves and around the V-neck, a green and gold striped tie, and even gold socks, according to our student researchers. The green and white summer dress was replaced with a more appropriate poly-cotton in a cool check pattern. The same material is still used today, although the style has been modified over the years.

In the following years, while boys were still happily wearing their grey shorts and shirts, various garments were introduced; a green pinafore dress with a detachable top for girls, a bottle green windcheater (with variations, still worn today.) Later the school had as the logo a yellow trapezium with a sun

at the centre and the school's name around the perimeter. Another variation used the school's initials and name as the logo.

Most recently Risdon Primary School uniform has evolved into very practical outfits for children. In winter both boys and girls can wear bottle green track pants with gold or green polo shirts (with short or long sleeves) and the green windcheaters. In summer unisex bottle green shorts replace long pants. Girls also have the option of the summer dress, and a dark green check skirt (with detachable pinafore top) in the winter. Sandals are also allowed nowadays!

Current parents of Risdon certainly do support the uniform. A survey conducted as part of the school uniform review of 1993 showed 98% of all respondents owned at least one item of uniform. More than 80% of children were wearing uniform at least four days a week.

Observations today show that uniform is most popular in the lower primary years. It is a matter of pride for our youngsters to show that they have moved on to a new phase in their lives, and every parent of an almost-five-year-old knows the delight and excitement that accompanies that first purchase of the special school clothes! Every rite of passage needs something special to mark it and at Risdon, the 'green and gold' is one such marker.