

Our Lady of the Visitation Uniform/Dress Code Revisions Nov. 1, 2013

Determining a dress code for a school is difficult. There are many factors that have to be taken into consideration. The number one question we have to ask ourselves as administrators is, "What is best for this community of kids?" That question underlies every decision we make here from curriculum to discipline to dress code. The second question we constantly ask ourselves is "What would the Lord have us do?" The teachers and staff in a Catholic school have a huge responsibility to be ambassadors for Christ. Kids and parents notice everything we say and do and we have to be constantly asking ourselves if we are reflecting Christ and Catholic teachings to them. We also know that we are constantly teaching others not only by what we say and do, but also by what we don't say and don't do. It's a huge responsibility and one we don't take lightly.

Once there is a rule/dress code/etc in place, it's in everyone's best interest for us to enforce it. When we don't, we inadvertently create tensions between students – "Why doesn't _____ have to follow the policy?" It also creates tensions between parents and children. A large majority of our parents valiantly encourage their children to follow the dress code (not a fun battle at 7:30 AM) either as part of their family values or as a life lesson in respecting authority. It's extremely frustrating to have their kids come to them at the end of the day to report that some of their friends were not in compliance. It makes the next battle even more tedious. If you hate enforcing the policies at home, imagine how we feel here.

We have heard that some object to having so many rules for out of uniform. We agree. There are too many rules. The reason for having them is simple – history. When we've tried to eliminate or reword some of the policies, there are some kids and adults who constantly look for loopholes and do not abide by the "spirit of the law" for the common good. When we'd say that some new fashion trend was not appropriate for school, parents or students would come back and say "that's not in the handbook." It's extremely time-consuming to check everyone and argue every point. Valuable instructional time was being wasted and it wasn't fair to the community at large.

The overarching theme for our dress code is that kids can come to school and be free to learn, free from pressure and distractions. While it's practically impossible to eliminate all competition among our kids with regard to dress, we strive to reduce it by having the kids wear a common uniform. We also strive to teach them their profound worth and dignity as sons and daughters of God. That means that they are "good enough" without make up, fancy jewelry, or the trendiest clothes. This is completely counter-cultural and a tough sell. We don't expect that every boy or girl will understand it at this age but we are going to try. Part of that message of dignity refers to modesty. While modesty can be subjective, the best we can do as administrators is follow our own conscience before God. The kids in grades six through eight are learning about the Theology of the Body – they're learning lessons about how precious their bodies are (in all shapes and sizes) and how they should in turn treat themselves and others. It would be contradictory of us to teach the value and dignity of the human body and then allow students to wear clothing designed to draw attention to the body in a way that is inappropriate for a Catholic school setting. Please note the wording in the attached revised dress code regarding form-fitting knit pants and tight jeans. As other new styles and trends come, we will address these in the spirit of our mission.

Under the “shoes” category for both boy and girls:

Gym shoes or dress shoes may be worn. No sandals, clogs, crocs, boots, or shoes that mar the floor are permitted. Shoes must be tied. If boots are worn to school, the student must change into gym shoes or dress shoes for the school day.

Under the “Out of Uniform Dress Code” category :

From time to time, the students may come out of uniform. These days are designed to be fun for all while keeping in line with the mission of our school. Some out of uniform days are announced as special “theme” e.g. funny hat, Visi colors, etc. Otherwise the “usual out of uniform rules apply.” This means clothing must be neat, clean and modest. No form-fitting knit pants/tights/jeans may be worn unless the backside is completely covered by a top or skirt. Shorts must be an appropriate length. All shirts must have sleeves. Once we have changed to cold-weather uniforms, shorts should not be worn for out of uniform days. All jewelry, makeup, and footwear rules stay in effect for out of uniform days. The principal reserves the right to determine appropriateness of clothing. If you have to ask, “Is it ok to wear?” The answer is probably, “no.”

Under the “gym” category:

- 3. Socks must be worn. (do not have to be white)*

Now you know where we’re coming from. As we move forward, we realize that some of you will read this and simply disagree. We anticipate and respect that. We realize we’re a large community with differing beliefs. We’ve tried to revise our wording on the dress code to make it even clearer and to help you at home. We’ve tried to share with our students the rationale behind our policies. Now we ask that you work with us to achieve our mission. When you don’t, you put your kids and us in a very difficult position and cause us to have to create even more “rules” and spend more time on uniforms and less on instruction. We’d like to keep “out of uniform” days and only time will tell if that will be possible.

We welcome any constructive criticism that will help us even further revise our dress code wording for clarity.