

Schools urged to adhere to the school uniform guidelines

The Competition Commission has urged schools to adhere to the school uniform guidelines aimed at curbing anti-competitive behaviour at schools.



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In a statement issued on the first day of school of the 2019 academic year, the Competition Commission said schools adhering to the school uniform guidelines would be complying with the Competition Act and ensuring that uniforms become reasonable and affordable.

An anti-competitive behaviour at schools investigation was concluded by the Competition Commission early last year. The probe established that a number of schools still had exclusive contracts with one supplier. These contracts didn't go through a competitive and transparent bidding process.

"Given the number of schools and other considerations, it was felt that schools must focus on the primary function, which is to educate. The Commission was reluctant to drag these schools through protracted litigation process and distract them from their main function," Competition Commission spokesperson Sipho Ngwema said in a statement.

He said the Competition Commission, during its investigation, engaged all stakeholders including private schools, suppliers,

governing bodies, and the government.

"We agreed on the implementation of school uniform guidelines issued by the government," he said. These include the following:

- School uniform should be as generic as possible such that it is obtainable from as many suppliers possible.
- Exclusivity should be limited to items that the schools regards as necessary to obtain from pre-selected suppliers e.g. badges.
- Schools should follow a competitive bidding process when appointing suppliers.
- Schools should appoint more than one supplier in order to give parents more options.
- The concluded agreements should be of limited duration.

"Subsequently, the Commission signed an MOU with FEDSAS, a federation of school governing bodies, which is aimed at educating and encouraging schools to comply with the guidelines," said Ngwema.

Further, the Commission engaged private schools like Curro, Advtech and Reddam House, among others.

"The private schools' response and cooperation was phenomenal. Thus, we have jointly approached the Competition Tribunal and the product of our interaction will be heard on 6 February 2019."

All the parties will make a joint announcement soon after the proceedings on the same day.

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