



## Parent Payment Policy

### Rationale

The Victorian community shares a vision to build an education system that champions excellence and ensures that every child and young person has access to the opportunities to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Schools are best placed to make local decisions which ensure that all students can access a broad range of learning opportunities that support their expectations and promote their aspirations as they move through the education system. Parent contribution, in all forms, assists schools to provide an enriched learning and teaching program for every student and is highly valued by school communities.

Learning and teaching programs vary across schools based on local needs and circumstances and reflect each school's priorities, decisions and resources. This, in turn, informs the parent payment charges approved by school councils that may vary from one school to the next.

### Aim

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

### Definitions

**Parent** in the policy has the same meaning as in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*, which is: **'parent'**, in relation to a child, includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for the child including parental responsibility under the *Family Law Act 1975* of the Commonwealth and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

### Implementation

#### WHAT CAN SCHOOLS CHARGE FOR?

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 provides for instruction in the standard curriculum program to be free to all students in government schools. School councils are responsible for developing and approving school-level parent payment charges and can request payments from parents under three categories only- Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

- **Essential Student Learning Items** are those items, activities or services that are essential to support student learning of the standard curriculum. These are items that the school considers essential for all students and which students take possession of. Parents may choose to provide the items themselves or buy the items from the school where practical and appropriate.
- **Optional Items** are those items, activities or services that are offered in addition to or support instruction in the standard curriculum program. These are provided on a user-pays basis so that if parents choose to access them for students, they are required to pay for them.
- **Voluntary Financial Contributions** Parents can be invited to make a donation to the school for a general or specific purpose, e.g. school grounds projects, library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible.

See **Appendix A** for the diagram "*Understanding Parent Payment Categories*" which provides examples of items and materials under each category.

In implementing this policy, schools must adhere to the following principles:

#### PRINCIPLES

- **Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when schools determine their parent payments practices.
- **Access, equity and inclusion:** All students have access to the standard curriculum program and participation of all students to the full school program is facilitated.
- **Affordability:** Cost to parents is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families at the school.
- **Engagement and Support:** Early identification and engagement strategies by the school ensure parents are well informed of the payment options and supports available for those experiencing hardship.
- **Respect and Confidentiality:** Parents and students experiencing hardship are treated with respect, dignity, sensitivity and without judgement and the identity and personal information of all parents and students are kept confidential in respect to parent payments.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** School parent payment practices are well communicated, clear and transparent and their impact on student programs and families are reviewed by school councils.

#### COST AND SUPPORT TO PARENTS

When school councils consider the proposed requests for parent payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the school.

School principals must ensure that:

- Items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed.
- Payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category.
- Parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the school.
- Information on payment options is available, accessible and easily understood to all parents so that they know what to expect and what supports they can access.
- Parents are provided with early notice of annual payment requests for school fees (i.e. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly.
- Parents are provided with reasonable notice of any other payment requests that arise during the school year- ensuring parents have a clear understanding of the full financial contribution being sought.
- The status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel.
- Parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next.



- Use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parents is not permitted.
- There will be only one reminder notice to parents for voluntary financial contributions per year.
- Invoices/statements for unpaid essential or optional items accepted by parents are not generated more than monthly or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.

### SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Families may experience financial difficulties and may be unable to meet the full or part payments requested. Principals and school councils exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of students and their families when considering parent payment fees. There are a range of support options available to support and assist parents. These can be accessed through [Cost Support for Families](#).

Consideration to hardship arrangements in respect to payment requests is provided to families experiencing long term hardship or short term crisis on a confidential, case by case basis. All schools have written hardship arrangements that include a proactive approach to providing support for parents experiencing financial difficulty.

All parents are provided the name and contact details of a nominated parent payment contact person at the school who they can discuss payment arrangements with.

### ENGAGING WITH PARENTS

In respect to each school's development of its parent payments, school councils will engage in effective communication with the school community and have strategies in place to ensure they are aware of and understand the needs and views of parents.

### REVIEW OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Schools will monitor the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of this policy at least annually as part of its ongoing improvement and report back to the school community.

The full Parent Payment Policy is available from the Department's [School Policy and Advisory Guide](#).

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents see [Frequently Asked Questions—For Parents](#).

### PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

**Essential Student Learning Items:** These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning in the standard curriculum. Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own. This includes items that the student takes temporary or permanent possession of such as student stationery books.

- The school determines whether an item, activity or service is an Essential Student Learning Item or an Optional Item within the context of the learning and teaching program.
- **Note:** If parents/carers choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this should be done in consultation with the school, and items should meet the specifications provided by the school.

**Optional Items:** These are items or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students may access these on a user pays basis.



These items include:

- Activities the student purchases, e.g. fees for extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum such as instrumental music tuition; fees for guest speakers; optional excursions and camps (see the [Camp Policy](#)); entry fees to school-based performances, productions and events.
- Items the student purchases or hires (e.g. class photos; graduation functions).

**Voluntary Financial Contributions:** Parents/carers, or anyone else, can be invited to make a donation to the school for the following purposes:

- Contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (e.g. equipment, materials or services) in addition to those funded through the SRP. This may include additional computers or student-related services and are NOT tax deductible.
- General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school and are NOT tax deductible.
- Donations to a building trust fund or contributions to a library trust fund (these trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office, have a Deductible Gift Recipients (DGR) status and are tax deductible to the donor).

## **PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS AND COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

### **Administrative Processes**

The Principal and School Council are responsible for approving parent payments.

The school will ensure that initial payment requests and letters to parents for student materials and services charges are accompanied by the following information:

- A description of each of the three parent payment categories.
- The materials and activities that parents are being asked to pay for.
- That parents are expected to provide Essential Student Learning Items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate.
- The availability of alternative payment options, including paying in instalments and an invitation to contact the Principal or nominated Parent Payment Contact Person, if the parent wishes to discuss the payments further.
- A copy or link to the Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

The school will ensure that:

- Administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
- Prior to generating reminder notices to parents for unpaid items, discretion should be exercised with families where there may be hardship or financial difficulty.
- Invoices for unpaid essential student learning items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
- Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice per year is sent to all parents/carers.

- Receipts are issued to parents/carers immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES 21.

All documentation relating to individual parent/carer payments will be kept confidential and in a secure location. It will be accessible only to the Principal, Business Manager and other nominated staff.

### **FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

- Where families have difficulty providing or paying the school to provide essential student learning items, the Principal will support parents to make an appointment to discuss with them alternative payment methods and the range of support options available such as obtaining support from State Schools Relief, accessing the Camps, Sports & Excursions Fund and welfare and welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.
- The Principal will also explore ways in which quality second-hand uniforms could be made available to families.
- The school will provide parents with the option of purchasing low cost school clothing.

### **CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

The Principal will fulfil the role of Parent Payment Contact Person.

Parents will be assured that their child/children will have access to the educational opportunities being offered by the school.

The Parent Payment Contact Person undertaking this function will do so with sensitivity, respect and understanding to ensure she/he is responsive to families' needs.

The Contact Person has authority to use their discretion within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to agree on the appropriate forms of support and assistance. These options may include, but are not restricted to:

- waiving of fees
- reduced fees
- deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- flexible payment plans
- referral to government and/or community assistance programs

The school will assess where there may be barriers to learning and participation for students on the basis of financial hardship. The DET aims to assist schools to ensure their activities and procedures are sensitive to low income families. Guidance for schools in better understanding and responding to family hardship is provided at— [Supporting Families Experiencing Hardship](#).

## **Evaluation**

### **MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

School Council is committed to monitor the implementation of the policy, identify the factors/measures to be taken into account, such as transparency of processes and engagement with parents, how/when it will be reported back to the school community, and timing and processes of review.

This policy will be reviewed as part of Fairfield Primary School's three-year review cycle in October 2021.

This policy was ratified by School Council in **October 2018**



# Understanding Parent Payment Categories

## Schools

### What does the legislation say?

The Education and Training Reform Act (2006) provides for free instruction in the standard curriculum program to all students in government schools. The Act also empowers school councils to charge fees to parents for goods and services provided by the school to a child.

In the Act, a 'Parent' includes a guardian and every person who has parental responsibility for a child including parental responsibility under the Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975 and any person with whom a child normally or regularly resides.

### What do schools pay for as part of 'free instruction'?



Free instruction is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with the instruction of the standard curriculum program, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

The standard curriculum for Years F-10 means implementation of the Victorian Curriculum F-10.

The standard curriculum for senior secondary schools means a program that enables a student to be awarded a VCE or VCAL qualification.

### What principles govern parent payment practice?

- Educational Value | Access, Equity & Inclusion | Affordability
- Engagement & Support | Respect & Confidentiality | Transparency & Accountability

## Parents

### What may parents be asked to pay for?

#### Schools can request payment for Essential Student Learning Items



These are items, activities or services that the school deems **essential** to student learning of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own.

These may also be either:

#### Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of

- e.g.
  - textbooks, activity books, exercise books
  - stationery, book bags
  - student ID cards, locks
  - cooking ingredients students will consume
  - materials for final products that students take home (technology projects, build-your-own kits, dioramas)
  - Picture Exchange Communication Systems

#### Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend

- i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation
- e.g.
  - excursions
  - incursions
  - school sports
  - work placements



Parents can be asked to pay for items, activities and services in the three Parent Payment Categories:

- Essential Student Learning Items,
- Optional Items and
- Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Schools determine how items, activities and services are classified within these categories based on the learning and teaching program of their school.

#### Schools can request payment for Optional Items

These are items, activities or services that are **optional** and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

Students may access these on a user-pays basis.

These may be either:

#### Items the student purchases or hires

- e.g.
  - school magazines, class photos
  - functions, formals, graduation dinners
  - materials for extra curricular programs
  - student accident insurance

#### Activities the student purchases

- e.g.
  - fees for extra curricular programs or activities, such as instrumental music tuition
  - fees for guest speakers
  - campus, excursions, incursions, sports
  - entry fees for school run performances

#### Items and/or materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum

- e.g.
  - use of silver in metal work instead of copper
  - supplementary exam revision guides

Support for families experiencing hardship is available at every school and each school has a parent payment contact person. See your school's policy for more information.

For more information on Parent Payments and Personal Devices, visit the DET website at: [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

Schools can invite **Voluntary Financial Contributions** for



- e.g.
  - Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
  - Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose, such as equipment, materials, services.
  - General voluntary contributions