

# Parent Payment Policy

## Purpose

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

## 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.

## What can the school 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<sup>1</sup> 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.

The attached diagram "Understanding Parent Payment Categories" provides examples of items and materials under each category.

## Principles

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

- **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**” at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/parents/financial/Pages/families.aspx>.

### **Consideration of hardship**

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.

Alternative payment options are available through the school and parents are encouraged to make an appointment through the administration office with the college business manager/parent payment contact officer, Bev Boys to discuss circumstances, available options and payments plans. These meetings are strictly confidential and supportive for those families experiencing financial hardship, assistance can also be available for textbooks and uniform.

### **Non Curriculum Related Activities**

**Participation in non-curriculum related activities, not limited to but including extra-curricular camps may be restricted if a participating student's "Essential Education Items" charges have not been paid in full.**

### **Payment arrangements**

Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions (e.g. a minimum of six weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous school year).

Costs will be kept to a minimum with payment requests/letters fair and reasonable. To further assist parents with payments, the following payment options are available;

- Option A - Full amount payable by first business day of early rollover (new school year) for years 8 - 12, commencing year 7 students full amount payable first business day in February.
- Option B - Individual payment arrangements

Payments may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used.

Payment requests to parents will be itemised and the category each item falls under will be clearly identified as an essential education item, optional education item or voluntary financial contribution. Receipts will be issued to parents immediately upon making payment.

Reminders for unpaid essential education items or optional extras will be generated and distributed on a regular basis to parents, but not more than once a month.

Failure to pay elective costs by the due date may result in the student being removed from the elective to a low or no costs elective.

Only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice will be issued per year to parents and guardians.

Alternative payment options are available through the school and parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the college business manager/parent payment contact officer to discuss circumstances, available options and payments plans.

## Family Support Options

### ***Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF)***

The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund provides payments for eligible students to attend camps, sports and excursions. Families holding a valid means-tested concession card or temporary foster parents are eligible to apply and a Special Consideration eligibility category also exists.

### ***State Schools' Relief***

State Schools' Relief may cover the cost of new school uniforms, shoes and more for disadvantaged students. State Schools' Relief only responds to requests from school principals, assistant principals or welfare coordinators. Parents or carers who are struggling need to make an appointment with the school to discuss their situation.

### ***Local community supports***

- **Saver Plus** is an initiative of Brotherhood of St Laurence and ANZ, delivered locally by community organisations in 22 locations in Victoria. Saver Plus assists individuals and families on lower incomes to have every dollar up to \$500 saved over a 10-month period matched by ANZ to go towards education-related costs.
- **The Smith Family's 'Learning for Life program'** provides financial support, guidance and mentoring for disadvantaged students. The Smith Family works with a select number of schools and may require referral from the school principal.
- **Good Shepherd Microfinance** provides affordable financial programs for people on low or limited incomes that may assist families to afford educational costs and other expenses.
- **Carrum Downs "buy and sell facebook page"** is an excellent resource for the purchase of secondhand books and uniforms.

## 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.

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents see:

[Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents](#)

**Evaluation:** This policy is required to be formally minuted and reviewed by College Council annually

**Related policies:** The full Parent Payment Policy is available from the Department's School Policy and Advisory Guide

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/parentpayments.aspx>

# 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
  - camp, 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

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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