

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

WARRAGUL & DISTRICT SPECIALIST SCHOOL

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 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 parents¹ 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.

¹ 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.

The attached diagram "Understanding Parent Payment Categories" 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 itemized 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.

"Our school will consider requests for partial or full refunds of payments made by parents on a case-by-case basis taking into account the individual circumstances. Generally we will not be able to refund payments made for items purchased or costs that have already been paid where those funds have already been transferred to a third party. For example, camp costs when a child becomes unwell and cannot attend in circumstances where the payment has already been made or committed to a third party and no refund is available to the school. Where possible, we will make this clear to parents at the time of payment."

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.

This policy was last ratified by School Council in....

Nov 2020

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

Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend

i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation

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 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
- camps, excursions, incursions, sports
- entry fees for school run performances



WARRAGUL & DISTRICT SPECIALIST SCHOOL

Parent Payment Policy

Schools will develop their own implementation approach; however the following elements need to cover to comply with the policy:

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Essential Education Items which parents and guardians are required to provide or pay the school to provide eg:

- Materials that the student takes possession of such as student stationery.
- Materials for learning and teaching where the student takes possession of the finalized article such as cooking, woodwork, textiles.
- Travel costs incurred in the course of receiving instruction from a teacher or other person.

Optional Extras & Electives are those that are offered to all students on a user pays basis and parents can choose whether or not their child participates eg: swimming, bowling, horse-riding, camps, sailing, extra curriculum excursions. If parents or guardians choose to access these optional programs for students, they **will** be required to pay for them.

Voluntary Financial Contributions which are non-compulsory donations for specific projects. eg: Building Trust, Library Trust etc clear specification of the Items, description and costs within the three payment categories

Articulate how payment requests support/enrich the school's learning/teaching program

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

- Payment can be made electronically via the schools bank account.
- Payment can be made at the school office noting that the school does not have epos.
- If payment is sent in with students it must be in a secure envelope clearly labelled.
- Second hand and low cost options e.g. school clothing pool, low cost suppliers.
- Centrepay – is a free, voluntary service for Centrelink customers to pay expenses such as education fees and expenses. This can be arranged through the school office.
- CSEF – Families may be eligible for Health care card if they receive specific commonwealth payments or supplements or the maximum rate of family Tax benefit A. The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF) will provide 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. \$125 per year will be paid for eligible primary school students, with \$225 per year paid for eligible secondary school students. Payments will go directly to the school and be tied to the student.
- State Schools Relief – families must have a Health care card or be faced with extreme circumstances. Families receive a Uniform package on the commencement of school and when the student reaches the age of thirteen.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

Detail how the school will provide support to parents experiencing hardship, including:

- *Matthew Hyde (Principal) & Cheryl Lee (Business Manager) are the nominated parent payment contact persons who parents can communicate with by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.*
- *the processes for meeting/communicating with parents experiencing hardship, including information to be provided*

Note: in reflecting on the school's hardship arrangements, schools could consider their proactive strategies to engage with parents disconnected from the school who may be experiencing hardship, such as discretely approaching families who may need support and special payment arrangements.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- *Parent Payment Policy and Implementation is available from the school office.*
- *Schools are encouraged to have this prominently on the school website.*
- *State the opportunities available for parents to raise any issues, make general inquiries about charges and the contact details where complaints can be referred*

"OUR SCHOOL WILL CONSIDER REQUESTS FOR PARTIAL OR FULL REFUNDS OF PAYMENTS MADE BY PARENTS ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE INDIVIDUAL CIRCUMSTANCES. GENERALLY WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO REFUND PAYMENTS MADE FOR ITEMS PURCHASED OR COSTS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN PAID WHERE THOSE FUNDS HAVE ALREADY BEEN TRANSFERRED TO A THIRD PARTY. FOR EXAMPLE, CAMP COSTS WHEN A CHILD BECOMES UNWELL AND CANNOT ATTEND IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE THE PAYMENT HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE OR COMMITTED TO A THIRD PARTY AND NO REFUND IS AVAILABLE TO THE SCHOOL. WHERE POSSIBLE, WE WILL MAKE THIS CLEAR TO PARENTS AT THE TIME OF PAYMENT."

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- *the school council will monitor the implementation of the policy, identify the factors/measures to be taken into account, such as transparency of processes and engagement with parents. The policy will be reviewed In November annually.*

Date of approval by School Council

10th November 2020