

	Policy Name:	Parent Payment Policy	Approved by School Council:	22.2.21
	Responsible:	Finance Committee	Review Date:	2022

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY

1. PURPOSE:

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

2. 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.

3. SCHOOL CHARGES:

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. See **APPENDIX 1** for DET Parent Payment Policy.

3.1 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:

- Materials that the individual student takes possession of, including text books and student stationery.
- The finalised articles for (e.g. ceramics, photography, cooking).
- Essential services associated with, but not considered to be a part of, instruction in the standard curriculum program such as costs associated with excursions and in school visits which all students are expected to attend (e.g. transport, food, accommodation and entrance costs).

3.2 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. These items include:

- Instructional support material, resources and administration beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program.
- Extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program e.g. swimming program, grade 5&6 electives in Semester 2.
- School-based performances, productions and events including fees for guest speakers.
- Camps, excursions, incursions and sporting events or activities.
- Entry fees for school run performances.
- Materials for subjects where the payment sought is the difference between the basic materials/services required for access to the standard curriculum program and higher cost alternatives.
- Materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program.
- School facilities and equipment not associated with provision of the standard curriculum program.

3.3 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, building and library fund or for new equipment. Only some Voluntary Financial Contributions are tax-deductible. This invitation for voluntary financial contributions may be for the following purposes:

- Contributions to a building fund or contributions to a library fund (these funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and are tax deductible).
- Contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school. This may include additional computers or student-related services.
- General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school.

The **APPENDIX 2 "Understanding Parent Payment Categories"** provides examples of items and materials under each category.

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

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

- 4.1 Educational value:** Student learning, aspirations and wellbeing are paramount when schools determine their parent payments practices.
- 4.2 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.
- 4.3 Affordability:** Cost to parents is kept to a minimum and is affordable for most families at the school.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 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.

4.6 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 Council.

5. IMPLEMENTATION:

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:

- 5.1** School Council determines parent payment charges annually.
- 5.2** Items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed.
- 5.3** Payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category.
- 5.4** Parents are advised that they have the option of purchasing equivalent Essential Student Learning Items themselves, in consultation with the school.
- 5.5** 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.
- 5.6** 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.
- 5.7** 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.
- 5.8** The status and details of any financial arrangements are kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel.
- 5.9** Parents experiencing hardship are not pursued for outstanding school fees from one year to the next.
- 5.10** Use of debt collectors to obtain outstanding school funds owed to the school from parents is not permitted.
- 5.11** Voluntary financial contributions will be sought by initial invitation and only one reminder notice to parents will be issued.
- 5.12** 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.
- 5.13** Charges will be kept to a minimum and will not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services provided to the student.
- 5.14** Credit card payments will be processed immediately and all card details will be blacked out. No credit card details will be kept on file at the school.
- 5.15** An ATO approved receipt will be issued at the time of payment for Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions. This receipt will include any tax-deductible voluntary donations to the Building Fund. The receipt must be retained by the parent as original receipts cannot be reprinted.
- 5.16** Parents can negotiate a payment or centre pay plan with the Principal or nominee.
- 5.17** Records of parent payments or contributions will be kept confidential.
- 5.18** Payment requests and statements for student materials and services charges will be accompanied by the following information:
 - Parents/guardians are required to provide essential education items for their students, and they have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate. Parents do this in consultation with the school, and items should meet

the specifications provided by the school. There may also be certain items that due to their nature may only be provided by the school.

- The availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the Principal/Business Manager if the parent wishes to discuss these.
- Details of how payments or contributions will be spent by the school.
- A copy of the school-level policy is available upon request.

6. PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS:

Payment requests or letters to parents/guardians will identify which category the items fall into, i.e., essential education items and/or optional education items.

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

7. REFUNDS:

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.

Before a school processes a refund, the original receipt is to be produced or receipt number identified by printing the family statement and the payment voucher for the refunded amount attached to the receipt document.

Refunds of less than \$30 will be processed as a credit note onto the family account.

For refunds greater than \$30 the parent may choose to have the amount as a credit note on their account or be paid by direct deposit to their bank account.

Refunds are never to be paid by cash to the parent or the student.

8. OTHER SUPPORT MATERIAL:

The school appreciates that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting requests for payments and contributions. A range of support options are available to assist parents, including CSEF, State Schools Relief, Local Community Support, Centrepay and the school can also offer parents a payment plan for Essential Items and Extra Curricular Activities (based on individual circumstances). Parents are encouraged to make an appointment with the Principal/Business Manager to discuss circumstances and available options.

9. REVIEW CYCLE:

This policy was approved by School Council on the 17th February 2020 and is scheduled for review in February 2021

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - DET Parent Payment Policy

Appendix 2 - Understanding Parent Payment Categories

REFERENCES : **[School Policy and Advisory Guide.](#)**