

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

WODONGA SOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

PURPOSE

To ensure that parent payment charges 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 Extras 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

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.

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.

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](#)

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
 - camps, 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

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

WODONGA SOUTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

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.

These goods and services fall into three Parent¹ Payment Categories:

- **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. These items **may** include:
 - Diaries, classroom resources, reports, access and ID cards, lock and locker rental
 - Information Technology resources
 - Materials that the student takes possession of, including text books and student stationary
 - Materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or take possession of the finished articles such as, cooking, arts and media
 - Transport and entrance for camps and excursions which all students are expected to attend.
- **Optional extras** – These are items that are provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and which are offered to all students. These *optional* extras are provided on a user-payers basis and if parents choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them. These items include:
 - Student computer orienting for personal use
 - Extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. instrumental music, dance classes
 - School- based performances, productions and events
 - School magazine, class photographs.
 - School functions, formals, graduation dinners
 - Fees for guest speakers
 - Camps, excursions, sports
 - Items and/or materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum.
- **Voluntary financial contribution** – These are items and services that parents are *invited* to make a donation to the school, such as the library, grounds, building and furniture.

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PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Parents will be provided with at least six weeks' notice of parent payment requests for School Fees which will be included in the schools Newsletter in the Last weeks of Term 4. Reasonable notice will be given for any other payment requests that arise during the school year.

Payment requests and letters to parents will provide a clear description of each item and the category each falls under e.g. Essential Education Item, Optional Education Item or Voluntary Financial Contribution.

Payments are kept to minimum. To further assist parents with payments, four payment options have been developed:

- Option 1 Full amount
- Option 2 Payment at the beginning of each Term
- Option 3 Half yearly payment (beginning of Terms 1 & 3)
- Option 4 Payment Plan

Payment Plans are available through the school with parents encouraged to make an appointment with the Business Manager to discuss circumstances and available options.

Schools have a variety of mechanisms that parents can access in making their payment which may include:

- cash / EFTPOS / Cheque
- Credit Card (if facilities are available)
- BPay
- Centrepay
- Scholarship or Award (if applicable to your student)
- Compass (dedicated software packages) (if available)
- Direct Deposit (if offered)

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

There are a range of support options available for families to make the costs of education more affordable.

Schools can elect to have a **Second Hand Uniform Shop** that disperses/sells second-hand items.

The **Camps, Sports and Excursion fund (CSEF)** provides payment 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 exist.

State Schools' Relief may cover the cost of new school uniforms, shoes, books and more for disadvantaged students. Applications can be made via the Principal to assist.

Visit on-line sites, such as:

- [State Schools' Relief clk2sell app](#)
- www.sustainableschoolshop.com.au
- [Trading websites \(e.g. gumtree\) or social media networks \(e.g. private Facebook groups\)](#)

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

Wodonga Federation of Government Schools appreciates that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting request for payments. The Federation is committed and responsive to families who may be experiencing either short term or long term hardship and are unable to make the requested payments. Consideration of hardship arrangements and concessions are provided on a confidential, case-by-case basis.

No student will be treated differently, denied access or refused instruction to the standard curriculum program for not making a payment.

The Business Manager can be contacted via email, phone or in person if a family is experiencing hardship to make alternative payment arrangements.

These arrangements may include, but are not restricted to:

- Waiving fees
- Reduced fees
- Deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
- Flexible payment plans
- Cost saving options available at the school, such as,:
 - Essential items that can be substituted at a lower cost or for items which the family already owns, e.g. stationery, uniforms items, school bag, calculator
 - Second-hand options, e.g. uniforms, text books and resources, stationery
 - Resources that can be loaned from the school.
- Referral to government assistance programs and community assistance programs in the local area.

For further information please see the Wodonga Federation of Government Schools Hardship Policy.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

The Federation is committed to open and transparent practices and communication.

Parents will be alerted to this Policy through regular articles in the School Newsletter. This Policy will be made publicly available via the Wodonga Federation of Government Schools website and member school websites.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

The Federation has a commitment to ongoing improvement, and ensuring that the impact of this policy and its implementation on students is assessed in an ongoing way. This policy will be reviewed in Term 4 each year.

The Wodonga Federation of Government Schools and member schools will review this policy and its implementation annually and update it as required. The policy will also be reviewed individually by school councils and will reflect the financial needs of each school that will then be made available to parents/carers via online websites, social media, via email by request or a hardcopy can be provided.

The Federation and its member school councils are responsive to families who may be experiencing financial hardship and will provide all means available to them to ensure that ALL students receive equitable, affordable and Inclusive Education.

Date of approval by School Council

December 2016