



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.

The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 ensures the provision for free instruction in the standard curriculum program, and empowers school councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds. 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.

The Department provides funding to schools through the Student Resource Package (SRP) and various programs. This includes funding for the standard curriculum program and associated education items, equipment and operational costs.

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

POLICY

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.

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Category	Description
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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. Examples are:
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- Items that the student takes temporary or permanent possession of such as text books, student stationery, book bags, Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)
- Materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. technology projects, workbooks, photography)
- School uniform (where applicable)
- Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend, such as costs associated with excursions and work placements.

Note: If parents choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this must be done in consultation with the school, and items should meet the specifications provided by the school. However, there are some items (e.g. food provisions for home economics) that, due to their nature, can only be 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:
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- 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 camps and excursions; entry fees to school-based performances, productions and events)
- Items the student purchases or hires (e.g. school magazines; class photos; formals/graduation functions; materials for extracurricular activities; student accident insurance)♣
- Items and materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum (e.g. use of silver in metal work instead of copper)

Category	Description
Voluntary financial contributions	<p>Parents, or anyone else, can be invited to make a voluntary contribution or donation to the school for the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. These contributions are NOT tax deductible. • General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school. These contributions or donations are NOT tax deductible.♣ • Donations to a building fund or library fund (if these funds have been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office and have a Deductible Gift Recipients (DGR) status). Donations to these funds ARE tax deductible to the donor.

Parent fees, levies and payment options will be determined each year by the school council.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

There are a range of other support options available for parents experiencing difficulty in paying for essential items including:

- CSEF (Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund)
- Access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the principal to assist with clothing/uniforms
- Welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.
- EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance), the EMA is provided to eligible families to help with the cost of essential education items such as textbooks, stationery, uniforms and excursions.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

Principals must exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. Principals are encouraged to make decisions about how to manage nonpayment of essential education items or optional extras on a case-by-case basis.

Where families have difficulty making payments, principals are expected to discuss with them the range of support options available, and to negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement, such as payment by instalments.

Principals are encouraged to explore ways to make quality second-hand books and uniforms available to parents in need.

Parents/guardians who experience difficulties providing or paying the school to provide essential education items, should be encouraged to make an appointment with the principal or other nominated senior staff member to discuss alternative payment methods.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

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 THE POLICY

As part of the Department's and each school's commitment to ongoing improvement, and ensuring that the impact of policies and practices on students are assessed in an ongoing way, implementation of the Parent Payment Policy and school practice will be reviewed as follows:

- School councils have a key role in ensuring the school level approach to parent payments reflects the shared expectations of the whole school community and is therefore responsible for monitoring effectiveness and impact on parents and students
- Parent payments and policy will be reviewed annually
- The Department will undertake regular audits for compliance with the Parent Payment Policy.

Date of approval by School Council

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
 - 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