

# Parent Payment Policy

## Purpose of this Policy

To ensure school-level parent payment policies and processes are compliant with the Department's policy requirements.

## Background

The *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program (i.e. eight key learning areas), and empowers school councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds.

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.

Free instruction includes learning and teaching, instructional supports, materials and resources, administration and facilities required to provide the standard curriculum program. The standard curriculum program includes core learning and teaching activities associated with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and senior secondary certificates (VCE, VCAL and VET programs).

## Policy

School councils are responsible for developing and approving a school-level parent payment policy that ensures:

- all students have access to the standard curriculum program
- it covers the three parent payment categories i.e. essential education items, optional extras or voluntary financial contributions
- the school does not withhold access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment for any of the three categories
- items that students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- cost is kept to a minimum
- payment requests must be clearly itemised within each category
- parents/guardians are given the option of purchasing equivalent essential education items themselves, in consultation with the school
- students are not treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program, refused instruction or disadvantaged on the basis of payments not being made for education items, services or voluntary financial contributions. For example if parents/guardians choose for their children not to attend a compulsory excursion/camp an alternative option needs to be provided.
- the status and details of any payments or non-payments are confidential
- parents are provided with early notice of payment requests (e.g. a minimum of six weeks notice prior to the end of the previous school year)

- payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used
- it meets the community's expectations and is provided to parents.

Principals, as executive officers of school councils, must ensure that the school-level policy complies with the Department's policy and that all staff are familiar with and adhere to it. Important:

- It is not acceptable to use coercion or harass parents/guardians to obtain payment.
- Principals must ensure any payment records are kept confidential. The public identification of students or their parents/guardians who have or have not made a payment or financial contribution is unacceptable and must not occur in any circumstance.
- Under no circumstances can collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used by schools to obtain any funds from parents/guardians.

## Catagories

This table describes the three parent payment categories that school councils can request payments from parents.

Category	Description
<b>Essential education items</b>	<p>These are items which parents/guardians pay the school to provide or may provide themselves, if appropriate. These items are essential to support instruction in the standard curriculum program and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• materials that the individual student takes possession of, such as text books and student stationery</li> <li>• materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. home economics, photography, catering)</li> <li>• school uniform (where applicable)</li> <li>• activities associated with, but not part of instruction in the standard curriculum program, such as costs associated with camps and excursions which all students are expected to attend (e.g. transport and entrance costs).</li> </ul>

Note: If parents/guardians choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this should 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) which, due to their nature, can only be provided by the school.

### **Optional extras**

These are items provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and are offered to all students. They are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents/guardians choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them. These items include:

- instructional support material, resources and administration in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. student computer printing for personal use)
- extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. instrumental music)
- school-based performances, productions and events
- 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 which may be more desirable (e.g. the use of more expensive materials)
- materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. school magazines)
- school facilities and equipment not associated with providing the standard curriculum program, and not otherwise provided for through the SRP (e.g. student accident insurance, and hire or lease of equipment such as musical instruments).

### **Voluntary financial contributions**

Parents/guardians, or anyone else, can be invited to make a donation to the school for the following purposes:

- contributions to a building trust fund or contributions to a library trust fund (these

trust funds are approved by the Australian Taxation Office and are tax deductible)

- 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
- general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school.

For a parent payment categories flowchart see: [Parent Payments Categories Flowchart \(PDF - 212KB\) \(pdf - 212.59kb\)](#)

## **School-level processes**

### Communication with parents

The school-level policy should ensure that all communication with parents/guardians, including payment requests, is fair and reasonable. Payment requests, letters or CASES21 invoices for student materials and services charges must be accompanied by the following information:

- a description of each of the three parent payment categories
- details of what parents are being asked to pay for
- that parents are required to provide essential education items for their children, and have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate
- the availability of alternative payment options and an invitation to contact the principal if the parent wishes to discuss these
- a copy of the school-level policy.

### Administrative and payment processes

The school-level policy should ensure that:

- there is a clearly articulated process for the administration of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), that payment arrangements coincide with the timing of the EMA's availability and that parents are not be pressured to sign over the EMA.
- administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
- invoices for unpaid essential education items or optional items accepted by parents are generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
- only the initial invitation for voluntary financial contributions and one reminder notice per year is sent to all parents/guardians.
- receipts are issued to parents immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES 21.

## Support Options

### 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.

Parents/guardians who have signed over their EMA cheque to the school should be informed that they:

- have the option of providing essential education items themselves
- can authorise the school to direct the family's EMA towards particular items
- are entitled to know how the EMA is being used for their child's education. Upon request, the principal should therefore advise parents/guardians of the itemised cost of student materials and services on which they propose to spend the EMA.

The EMA cannot be used to offset voluntary financial contributions.

Any portion of the EMA not expended by the end of the year must be returned to the parent unless there is agreement by the parent that this money can be carried over into the next year. For more information on EMA see: [Education Maintenance Allowance](#)

### Other support options

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

- 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.

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 non-payment 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.

## Support Materials For School Use

The following document provides a range of templates for school use to support communicating with families about parent payments, see: [Parent Payment Support Materials for School Use \(DOC - 732KB\) \(doc - 732kb\)](#)

Schools have also identified a range of good practice processes including:

- using the Department's samples as the basis to develop school-level policies and processes
- having strong relationships with local communities and organisations to source supplies at competitive prices
- purchasing second-hand text books from former students to be used as class sets.

## Department Resources

- Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents, see: [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- Information on the financial assistance options available for parents and students, including the EMA, Youth Allowance Scheme, ABSTUDY and student scholarships, see: [Costs and Financial Assistance](#)
- Financial management, see: [Finance](#)
- Further support, contact the relevant regional office or the School Operations and Governance Unit – Regional Services Group via the School Policy and Advisory Guide email: [theguide@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:theguide@edumail.vic.gov.au)
- Guidelines for parent/guardian complaints processes, see: [Parent Complaints](#)

## Related legislation

*Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Sections 2.2.4.(1), 2.3.6 (1)(c), 2.2.

*This Code of Conduct was endorsed/approved by the Malvern Central School Council on **October 2016** for review if legislative or other changes require in the interim or no later than **December 2018**.*