

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND

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.

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:

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.

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.

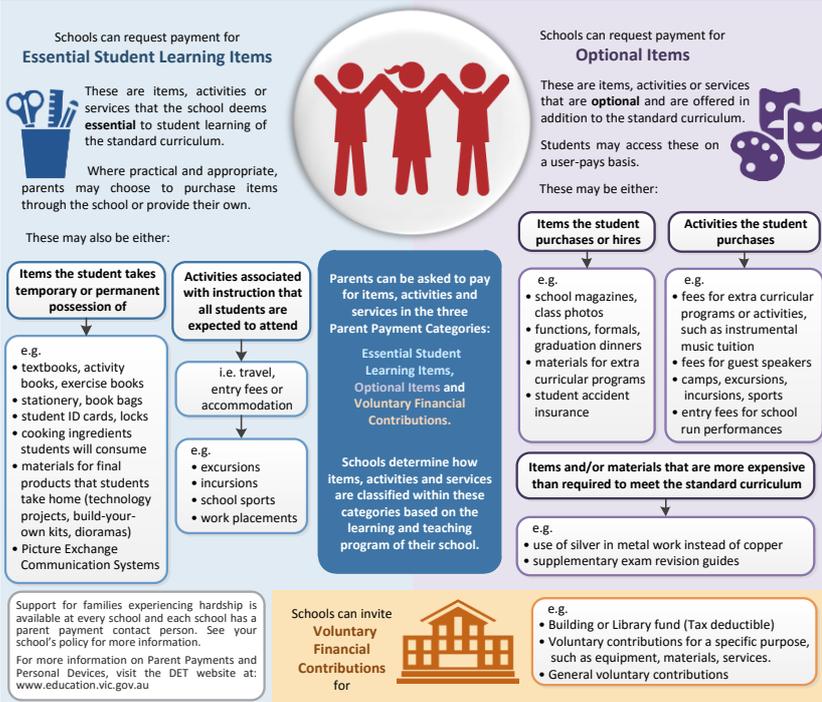
The standard curriculum for senior secondary schools means a program that enables a student to be awarded a VCE or VCAL qualification.

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?



Sunshine Heights Primary School Parent Payment Policy

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

- *Parent payments are a valuable contribution to enhancing and enriching the educational experience. These payments allow our school to offer enhanced programs and opportunities for our students.*
- *The items, description and costs within the three payment categories that our school may charge for include:*

Essential Student Learning Items

These are items, activities or services that the school deems essential to student learning in the standard curriculum including:

- *items that students take temporary or permanent possession of, such as textbooks, stationery and school uniforms*

- *materials for learning and teaching where students construct, consume or take possession of the finished articles (for example Visual Arts Program, Spanish and Science)*
- *activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend such as travel, entry fees or accommodation (for example, excursions, incursions, school sports, Footsteps, Drumming).*

Optional Items

These are items, activities or services that are optional and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students access these on a user-pays basis.

These items include:

- *items that the student purchases or hires (for example, school magazines, class photos, fees for guest speakers, functions, formals and student accident insurance)*
- *activities the student purchases such as fees for extra-curricular programs or activities including instrumental music tuition*
- *items and materials that are more expensive that are required to meet the standard curriculum (for example, requesting payment for the use of mahogany in woodwork instead of pine).*

Voluntary Financial Contributions

These are donations to the school for a general or specific purpose (for example, school grounds projects, library fund or for new equipment).

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

- *Parents are provided with early notification of annual installments (a minimum of six weeks notice prior to the end of the previous school year). This enables parents to save and budget accordingly.*
- *Parents may make payments through Qkr payment app or EFTPOS at the front office.*
- *Parents have the option to pay in installments and may contact the Principal (by phone 03 9311 2910 or email sunshine.heights.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au) to make confidential payment arrangements.*

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- *A number of support options are available to families to help make the costs of education more affordable. These include:*
 - *A school based uniform shop*
 - *The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund provides 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 and a Special Consideration eligibility category also exists.*
 - *State Schools' Relief may cover the cost of new school uniforms, shoes, books and more for disadvantaged students. State Schools' Relief only responds to requests from school principals, assistant principals or welfare coordinators. Parents or Carers who are struggling need to make an appointment with the school to discuss their situation.*

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

- *Sunshine Heights Primary School understands that families can experience financial difficulty or a crisis that makes the payment difficult. The school will provide support to parents experiencing hardship. Parents may contact the Principal for a confidential discussion and information about support options available. The Principal can be contacted by phone 03 9311 2910, email sunshine.heights.ps@edumail.vic.gov.au or in person.*

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- *The Parent Payment Policy and Implementation will be published on the school website along with the Department of Education's FAQ's for parents document. It will also be included with the Prep pack and announced in the school newsletter; FlexiBuzz and attached to the annual payment request.*
- *Parents may contact the Principal to raise any issues, make general inquiries about charges or to discuss any concerns.*

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- *The School Council Policy Sub-Committee will conduct an annual review to monitor the implementation of the policy and ensure that it meets the expectations of our school community. Any changes regarding the Parent Payment Policy will be communicated through the school website, newsletter and FlexiBuzz.*

Date of approval by School Council 21-6-2017
Reviewed June 30th 2017
To be reviewed June 2018