

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

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

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

The School Council of Albion North Primary School recognizes that parent payment and contribution is a sensitive issue and expects that all matters relating to this will be treated with respect and confidentiality.

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Essential Student Learning Items: parent payment will be used to support essential student learning in the classroom.

The Parent Payment Charge, as approved by School Council, will cover the cost of the student's notebook computer/iPad for the 2020 school year. It will also cover the cost of items associated with this technology including printing, software/apps, internet use (where applicable) headphones, mouse, and technical support. It will not cover the cost of insurance or item replacement in the case of willful damage or neglect.

Support materials required in the classroom such as stationery, book bags and materials and equipment required in subject specific areas such as art/craft and physical education will be covered by the school through the DET quarterly grant. This grant also covers payments for utility bills, maintenance and grounds upkeep.

For the 2020 school year, parent payment for essential items has been set by School Council at \$160. This payment will be reviewed by School Council each year but will be kept as low as possible. Parents will be given notice regarding payment and will be offered ways to pay off this amount (or other alternatives) when necessary.

Optional Items: optional items that are offered in addition to the standard curriculum include school photos, camps, excursions, visiting performers, in-school workshops, sport, year level specific events such as Year 6 Graduation, 100 Days of Prep. Other items may be added as required.

These items **may** incur a cost to the parent and will be charged on a user-pays basis. The school will make every effort to keep costs as low as possible, to give parents ample notice for payment and to arrange payments plans (or other alternatives) when necessary.

Voluntary Contributions: voluntary contributions will be kept to a minimum. If a specific need or goal is identified by School Council, parents may be asked to contribute on a voluntary basis.

Families and community members who wish to make a voluntary contribution to the school may do so provided this does not contravene any School Council or Department of Education policy, regulation or conflict of interest. If this occurs the process will be transparent and the item/s purchased with the contribution will be publicly acknowledged.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Parent payments will usually be required as a full amount payment so that the school can cover its costs and not fall into debt. Parents will be offered a discount if the payment is made before the end of the current school year.

Parents will be given as much notice as possible for payments and will be advised to contact the school if they are experiencing difficulties with payments.

Payment by installment can be arranged through the school's office. This option will be advertised on all notices requesting payment that are sent home. The school will respect the privacy and dignity of families in this matter and will request that parents who need to pay by installment contact the office.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

Family support options for available to families include:

- Use of CSEF monies if available. When information about any parent payment is sent home, the Business Manager will clearly indicate how much of the payment is covered using CSEF funds.
- Use of State Schools Relief for uniforms
- The school will offer quality, low priced second hand uniforms when possible.
- Parent payment plans, if required

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

The School Council understands that parents may have difficulty making payment either permanently or from time to time. School Council is adamant that no child will miss out on receiving the essentials for learning or on taking part in extra-curricular activities due to the financial hardship of their family. School Council expects that at Albion North Primary School, *every child is given every opportunity, every day.*

- The school will provide a nominated parent payment contact person who parents can communicate with by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments. The name of this person may change depending on the event and will be made clear in communication to parents.
- Any parent who is experiencing hardship will be welcome to visit the school's office and speak privately with the Business Manager or Student Wellbeing Co-ordinator (currently the Principal)
- All teachers will remain alert to the changing needs of children in their class. If there is any concern for a child at any time, teachers will be expected to speak with the Student Wellbeing Co-ordinator immediately.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

This policy will be available to families via the school's website. A hard copy will be available on request from the school's office.

Payments for Essential Student Learning Items for the next school year will be communicated to all families after the October meeting of School Council. Payments for the following year can be made at any time after this communication.

Payments for optional items will occur with as much notice to parents as possible.

Staff will establish a whole school calendar showing pre-booked events that require optional payments (eg. Camps, swimming, Life Ed). Teachers will be asked to keep requests for additional payments to a minimum and to avoid clashes with pre-booked events.

The school's newsletters in November, December and February will clearly indicate payments that are to be made for essential items.

Any parent wishing to discuss the Parent Payment Policy may contact the school at any time to arrange a meeting with the Principal. This includes parents wishing to make general inquiries about charges or to complain about any part of the policy. If an agreement cannot be reached over a complaint, parents will be directed to contact the appropriate person at the regional office.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

School Council will monitor the implementation of this policy each term. School Council delegates this responsibility to the Principal. A review of the policy (including payment amounts) will occur annually at the October meeting. Payments for Essential Student Learning Items for the next school year will then be communicated to all families and parent payment plans established where necessary.

Date of approval by School Council

18th November 2019

Reviewed annually