**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 a free 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. Curriculum contributions, 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.

**Implementation**

**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 curriculum contributions from parents under three categories only- Curriculum Contributions, Other Contributions and Extra Curricular Items and Activities.

**Curriculum Contributions** are the voluntary financial contributions for curriculum items and activities which the school deems necessary for students to learn the Curriculum.

**Other Contributions** are the voluntary financial contributions for non-curriculum items and activities that relate to the school’s functions and objectives

**Extra Curricular Items and Activities** are those items and activities that enhance or broaden student’ schooling experience and are above and beyond what the school provides for free to deliver the curriculum. These are provided on a user-pays basis

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 council considers the proposed requests for parent payments the cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the school.

The School Principal 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.”**](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/PP_Costsupportforfamilies.docx)

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**

School council 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.

**PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS AND COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES**

**Administrative Processes**

The Principal and School Council are responsible for approving parent payments.

The school will ensure that initial payment requests and letters to parents for student materials and services charges are accompanied by the following information:

* A description of each of the three parent payment categories.
* The materials and activities that parents are being asked to pay for.
* That parents are expected to provide Essential Student Learning 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, including paying in instalments and an invitation to contact the Principal or nominated Parent Payment Contact Person, if the parent wishes to discuss the payments further.
* A copy or link to the Parent Payment Policy and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).

**The school will ensure that:**

* Administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
* Prior to generating reminder notices to parents for unpaid items, discretion should be exercised with families where there may be hardship or financial difficulty.
* Invoices for unpaid essential student learning 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/carers.
* Receipts are issued to parents/carers immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES 21.

All documentation relating to individual parent/carer payments will be kept confidential and in a secure location. It will be accessible only to the Principal, Business Manager and other nominated staff.

**FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

* Where families have difficulty providing or paying the school to provide essential student learning items, the Principal will support parents to make an appointment to discuss with them alternative payment methods and the range of support options available such as obtaining support from State Schools Relief, accessing the Camps, Sports & Excursions Fund and welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.
* The Principal will also explore ways in which quality second-hand uniforms could be made available to families.
* The school will provide parents with the option of purchasing low cost school clothing.

**CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

Watsonia North Primary School has nominated the Principal to fulfil the role of Parent Payment Contact Person. Parents will be assured that their child/children will have access to the educational opportunities being offered by the school. The Parent Payment Contact Person undertaking this function will do so with sensitivity, respect and understanding to ensure she/he is responsive to families’ needs.

The Contact Person has authority to use their discretion within the mandate of the policy and guiding principles to agree on the appropriate forms of support and assistance. These options may include, but are not restricted to:

* waiving of fees
* reduced fees
* deferred payment or the extension of payment deadlines
* flexible payment plans
* referral to government and/or community assistance programs

The school will assess where there may be barriers to learning and participation for students on the basis of financial hardship. The DET aims to assist schools to ensure their activities and procedures are sensitive to low income families. Guidance for schools in better understanding and responding to family hardship is provided at Supporting Families Experiencing Hardship.

**Resources**

The full Parent Payment Policy is available from the Department’s [**School Policy and Advisory Guide.**](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/pages/parentpayments.aspx)

Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents see:
[**Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents**](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/spag/management/PP_FAQforparents.docx)

**Evaluation**

This policy was endorsed by School Council on 18 October 2022 and is scheduled for review in 2023 as per DET guidelines.

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 Sarah Pollnitz (Acting Principal) Adrian Lim (School Council President)

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| A black and white image of a person's face  Description automatically generated with low confidence | FREE INSTRUCTION* Schools provide students with free instruction and ensure students have free access to all items, activities and services that the school uses to fulfil the standard curriculum requirements in Victorian Curriculum F-10, VCE and VCAL.
* Schools may invite parents to make a financial contribution to support the school.
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| Icon  Description automatically generated | PARENT PAYMENT REQUESTSSchools can request contributions from parents under three categories:

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| Curriculum ContributionsVoluntary financial contributions for curriculum items and activities which the school deems necessary for students to learn the Curriculum. | Other ContributionsVoluntary financial contributions for non-curriculum items and activities that relate to the school’s functions and objectives. | Extra-Curricular Items and ActivitiesItems and activities that enhance or broaden students' schooling experience and are above and beyond what the school provides for free to deliver the Curriculum. These are provided on a user-pays basis. |

* Schools may also invite parents to supply or purchase educational items to use and own (e.g. textbooks, stationery, digital devices).
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| A picture containing clipart  Description automatically generated | FINANCIAL HELP FOR FAMILIES* Schools put in place financial hardship arrangements to support families who cannot pay for items or activities so that their child doesn’t miss out.
* Schools have a nominated parent payment contact person(s) with which parents can have a confidential discussion regarding financial hardship arrangements.
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| Icon  Description automatically generated | SCHOOL PROCESSES* Schools must obtain school council approval for their parent payment arrangements and publish all requests and communications for each year level on their school website for transparency.
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