

## Purpose:

To ensure that parent payment practices are consistent, transparent and ensure that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

## Scope:

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 College 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 parents<sup>1</sup> under three categories only- Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions.

**Essential Student Learning Items (Part 1.2 & 1.3)** 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.](#)" (see attachment)

### **Second-hand strategies (details taken from 'cost Support for families')**

Schools need to be aware of second-hand options available for items commonly required by students and communicate these to parents (e.g. uniforms, stationery).

Second-hand options may include:

- 'Second Hand School Specialists' which works with the School. You can buy and sell your second hand school stuff through the 'Second Hand School Specialists'. For more information visit their website [www.secondhandschoolspecialists.com.au](http://www.secondhandschoolspecialists.com.au)

### **Government Assistance Programs**

The School appreciates that families may sometimes experience financial difficulties in meeting requests for payments and contributions. Support options are available to assist parents, including Camps, Sport & Excursions Fund (CSEF) and State Schools' Relief Committee support.

- 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.

### **Commonwealth Family Assistance**

*The Commonwealth Government provides a range of payments and services to help families look after their children's health, education and other family issues.*

- The Child Care Benefit helps eligible families with the cost of outside School hours care, vacation care and registered care. For more information about eligibility and making claims, see Centrelink: [Child Care Benefit](#)
- To be eligible for either of the Family Tax Benefits, A or B, or a Parenting Payment, families must meet an income test. For more information, see: [Centrelink: Families](#)
- [Health Care Card](#) provides help with the with the cost of prescription medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Commonwealth-funded medical services, and access to state, territory and local government concessions. Families may be eligible for a Health Care Card if they receive specific Commonwealth payments or supplements or the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit A.
- [Centrepay](#) is a free, voluntary service for Centrelink customers to pay expenses as regular deductions from their Centrelink payments. Centrepay can help families to pay for many types of bills, such as education fees and expenses, child care, rent, electricity, gas and water bills, or medical services.

### **Other support options**

Parents and guardians will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions (a minimum of SIX weeks' notice prior to the end of the previous School year).

Payments are kept to a minimum with payment requests and letters fair and reasonable. To further assist parents with payments, payment options have been developed:

- Option A      **Part 1.2 Full amount at the start of the new School year**
- Option B      **Part 1.2 Part Payment-Half-  
Half by week 2 of Term 1 and half by week 8 of Term 2**
- Option C      **Other payment arrangements\***

\*(Please make an appointment with the Principal or Fran Dillon, Business Manager to discuss other payment arrangements.)

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](#)

## **Review cycle and evaluation**

This policy was last ratified by College Council on **February 2021** and is scheduled for review in **February 2022**.

# 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](http://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

## **COST SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES**

*There are a range of different support options available for all families to help make the costs of education more affordable.*

### **REDUCING SCHOOL COSTS**

*There are a number of cost-saving strategies that Schools can implement to reduce the impact of School costs on families.*

#### **LOWERING THE COST OF ESSENTIAL STUDENT LEARNING ITEMS**

*Schools should look to engage multiple suppliers in order to offer a broad price variety and ensure supplier costs are competitive.*

*Schools should outline which Essential Student Learning Items on their booklists can be supplied by families themselves (i.e. substituted for low-cost or generic versions, or substituted for items that the family already owns, e.g. stationery, uniform items, School bag, calculator).*

*Iron-on School logos should be available for uniform items that can be purchased at a lower cost but require a School logo, e.g. hats, skivvies.*

*Schools should ensure that costs are minimised on excursions and should consider whether there are:*

- *any 'hidden' additional costs built into the excursion that may be unaffordable for some students, e.g. opportunity to purchase meals or souvenirs.*
- *transport alternatives – is it appropriate for students to walk or take public transport between locations?*
- *any virtual excursion or conferencing opportunities that could also enrich student's engagement with the learning and teaching program. (For more information, see: [Virtual Learning](#), [Virtual Conferencing](#))*

#### **SECOND-HAND STRATEGIES**

*Schools need to be aware of second-hand options available for items commonly required by students and communicate these to parents (e.g. uniforms, stationery, textbooks, calculators).*

*Second-hand options may include:*

- *A School-based uniform shop that sells both new and second-hand items*
- *Swap days at the start, middle and/or end of the year for uniforms, textbooks etc.*
- *Trading in second hand items through the School uniform or book supplier*
- *Online platforms, such as:*
  - [State Schools' Relief clk2sell app](#)
  - [www.sustainableSchoolshop.com.au](http://www.sustainableSchoolshop.com.au)
  - *trading websites (e.g. gumtree) or social media networks (e.g. private Facebook groups)*

#### **SCHOOL LOANS**

*Some resources can be loaned from the School for periods that can vary from daily to yearly, depending on the School and the resource. Some Schools may require a deposit or assurance that damages will be paid for by the responsible party. Items available for loan could include text books (digital and/or hard-copy), devices, essential equipment such as graphic calculators etc.*

#### **GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS**

- *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.

- [Student Scholarships](#) are generally awarded on the basis of academic achievement, participation in the School and local community, or financial need, but are not limited to these. The Department of Education and Training administers 35 different student scholarships, equating to approximately 250 scholarship awards as some scholarships have more than one award.

### COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Schools are encouraged to develop strong links with local services and welfare groups which can provide specialist support and assistance to students and families in financial crisis. Connections with local businesses can also help families by providing discounts for low income families on School-related purchases (e.g. shoes, stationery).

### INFORMATION SERVICES

- [Crisis Referral Information System \(CRIS\) Online Directory](#) provides a broad range of information for people seeking welfare assistance, advice and general referral and support. The online directory contains comprehensive information on services and organisations such as those providing support in respect to accommodation, domestic violence, drug & alcohol treatment, health, material aid and mental health.
- [Community Information and Support Victoria \(CISVic\)](#) is the peak body representing local community information and support services. Its member agencies assist people experiencing personal and financial difficulties by providing information, referral and support services including emergency relief.
- [Emergency Relief \(ER\) Victoria](#) is the peak body for the Victorian emergency relief sector, with over 100 member organisations offering material aid and support to families experiencing a financial crisis or emergency.
- [Financial Counselling Victoria \(FCV\)](#) is a non-profit organisation providing financial counselling through advocacy and information to disadvantaged and vulnerable members of the community. FCV can provide advice over the phone, email or in person and can assist with referrals to other community and government support such as legal advice, material aid, and emergency relief.

### COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- [School Breakfast clubs](#)  
*School Breakfast clubs run throughout Victoria either by the School community or in collaboration with a non-government organisation. While [Foodbank](#) has established the School Breakfast Clubs program for 250 of Victoria's most disadvantaged Schools with Victorian Government support, other organisations such as the [Australian Red Cross](#) and [Ardoch Youth Foundation](#) also assist Schools to source donations to run School Breakfast programs.*
- [Saver Plus](#) is an initiative of Brotherhood of St Laurence and ANZ, delivered locally by community organisations in 22 locations in Victoria. Saver Plus assists individuals and families on lower incomes to have every dollar up to \$500 saved over a 10-month period matched by ANZ to go towards education-related costs.
- [The Smith Family's 'Learning for Life program](#) provides financial support, guidance and mentoring for disadvantaged students. The Smith Family works with a select number of Schools and may require referral from the School principal.

- [Travellers Aid Australia's Pathways to Education program](#) provides student travel passes to young people experiencing financial difficulties, enabling them to travel to School or other forms of training and education. The program is limited to students who attend secondary education in an alternative setting, namely community Schools and secondary education at a tertiary institution.
- [A Start in Life](#) is an Australian charity based in New South Wales that provides assistance to disadvantaged students from kindergarten through to tertiary studies.
- [Good Shepherd Microfinance](#) provides affordable financial programs for people on low or limited incomes that may assist families to afford educational costs and other expenses. The [No Interest Loan Scheme \(NILS\)](#) provides access to fair and safe credit (up to \$1,200) for the purchase of essential goods and services delivered through a network of local community organisations in 650 locations across Australia, including through Financial Counselling Victoria and Travellers Aid.

### COMMONWEALTH FAMILY ASSISTANCE

The Commonwealth Government provides a range of payments and services to help families look after their children's health, education and other family issues.

- The Child Care Benefit helps eligible families with the cost of outside School hours care, vacation care and registered care. For more information about eligibility and making claims, see Centrelink: [Child Care Benefit](#)
- To be eligible for either of the Family Tax Benefits, A or B, or a Parenting Payment, families must meet an income test. For more information, see: [Centrelink: Families](#)
- Depending on family circumstances, young people between 15 and 24 years of age may be eligible for [Youth Allowance](#), [Newstart Allowance](#) or [ABSTUDY](#). These payments provide financial support while young people are looking for work, studying, training or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship.
- [Health Care Card](#) provides help with the with the cost of prescription medicine under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Commonwealth-funded medical services, and access to state, territory and local government concessions. Families may be eligible for a Health Care Card if they receive specific Commonwealth payments or supplements or the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit A.
- [Centrepay](#) is a free, voluntary service for Centrelink customers to pay expenses as regular deductions from their Centrelink payments. Centrepay can help families to pay for many types of bills, such as education fees and expenses, child care, rent, electricity, gas and water bills, or medical services.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Ardoch School Costs Guide 2016](#)

Ardoch Youth Foundation has published a comprehensive list of support options available to provide financial assistance to families and reduce School costs.

- [Reducing School Costs](#)

Australian Securities and Investments Commission's (ASIC) Money Smart website has some helpful recommendations of how to reduce School costs and includes a comprehensive online budget planner to help families work out their School expenses.