



PARENT PAYMENT POLICY

Approved by School Council:
February 2020

Review:
February 2021

Purpose

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 Curriculum 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 itemized 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.
- the status and details of any payments or non-payments are confidential
- parents are provided with early notice of payment requests
- 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.

Categories

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

Category	Description
Essential education items	<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"> ▪ materials that the individual student takes possession of, such as text books and student stationery ▪ materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. home economics, photography, catering) ▪ school uniform (where applicable) ▪ 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). <p>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.</p>
Optional extras	<p>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.</p> <p>These items include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ instructional support material, resources and administration in addition to the standard curriculum program ▪ extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program ▪ 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

Category	Description
	<p>program and higher cost alternatives which may be more desirable (e.g. the use of more expensive materials)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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).
<p>Voluntary financial contributions</p>	<p>Parents/guardians, or anyone else, can be invited to make a donation to the school for the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 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:

- 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

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

- the Schoolkids Bonus which is provided by Centrelink to help with education costs and is automatically paid in January and July to eligible families and students
- access to State Schools' Relief committee support via the principal to assist with uniforms, shoes, textbooks, stationery and software, see Financial Assistance for Families
- the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which is available for eligible families, to cover the costs of school trips, camps and sporting activities
- 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 \(doc - 729kb\)](#)

Review Cycle

This policy will be reviewed annually as part of the school's review cycle.