Parent Payments & Voluntary Contributions

Rationale
School councils are responsible for developing a school-level policy which covers essential education items, optional extras and voluntary financial contributions.

Implementation
The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 ensures the provision of free instruction in the standard curriculum program, and empowers school councils to charge for goods and services used in the course of instruction and to raise funds.

Free instruction includes learning and teaching, instructional supports, materials and resources, administration and facilities associated with the provision of the standard curriculum program. The standard curriculum program includes core learning and teaching activities associated with the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 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 which are an integral part of the SRP.

School councils have the responsibility to develop policy and plans to allocate their overall resources – human, financial and physical – in accordance with the goals, targets and strategies outlined in their strategic plan. This includes the allocation of funding provided under the SRP, any other funding provided by DEECD and locally-raised funds.

Categories of parent payments
School councils can request payments from parents for student materials and services charges, and for voluntary financial contributions. These payments fall into three categories:

1. Essential education items are those items used in the course of instruction in the standard curriculum program that parents and guardians are responsible for and may choose to either provide or pay the school to provide.

   These items include:
   
   - materials that the individual student takes possession of, including text books and student stationery
   - materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finalised articles (e.g. cooking, art/craft, photography);
   - essential services associated with, but not considered to be a 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).

   Parents and guardians must be given the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources. If parents and guardians choose to provide equivalent materials, 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 used for cooking, photocopied hand outs, drama, music and art materials) which, due to their nature, may only be provided by the school.

2. Optional extras (or non-essential materials and services) are those that are provided in addition to the standard curriculum program, and which are offered to all students. These optional extras are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents and guardians choose to access them for students, they will be required to pay for them.

   These items include:
   
   - camps and excursions
   - instructional support material, resources and administration beyond the provision of the standard curriculum program (e.g. student computer printing for personal use and religious education materials)
   - extra-curricular programs or activities (e.g. instrumental music tuition)
   - school-based performances, productions and events
   - materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. school magazines)
• school facilities and equipment not associated with provision of 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).

3. Voluntary financial contributions. School councils may invite voluntary financial contributions for the following purposes:

• contributions to the building trust fund or the 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.

Payment requests must identify the payment category each item falls under (i.e. essential education item, optional education item or voluntary financial contribution) and where appropriate provide a breakdown against each of these specific items.

Support options

Parents who have difficulty paying for essential items can access a range of support options including:

The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is provided by the Victorian Government to low income families to assist with the cost of educating their children. Parents can choose to have the EMA paid directly to the school, helping towards essential education items charges. If the essential education items are paid in full, the money can be used towards camps, excursions, incursions or uniform items.

Access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the principal to assist with clothing/uniforms.

The Principal will exercise sensitivity to the differing financial circumstances of individual students and their families. Decisions about how to manage non-payment of essential education items or optional extras will be on a case-by-case basis. Where difficulties are incurred, appropriate alternative arrangement may be made, such as payment by instalments.

Second hand uniforms are available to all parents.

Payment arrangements and non-payment

• students will not be treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program, or refused instruction on the basis of payments not being made for education items, services or voluntary financial contributions

• unpaid optional extras payments may compromise a student’s ability to be involved in the optional activity in question. Payment plans may be organised with the Principal to permit the child to participate. Regular payments must be adhered to. Failure to show commitment to the payment plan will result in exclusion from other optional extras until payment is made in full

• all students have access to the standard curriculum program

• parents and guardians are provided with an alternative option for their children if they choose not to participate in an excursion or camp

• 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 is sent to all parents and guardians

• under no circumstances can collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used by schools to obtain any funds from parents and guardians.

• Any record of payments or contributions by parents and guardians will be kept confidential. The public identification of students or their parents and guardians who have or have not made a payment or financial contribution is unacceptable and must not occur in any circumstances.

Responsibility: Principal, Assistant Principal, Business Manager and Office staff.

Ratified at School Council: 25th March 2014

Due for Review: With the school’s three year review cycle, or at the first school council meeting after any changes are made.