

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Montrose Primary School

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

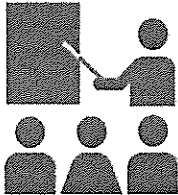
Schools

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.

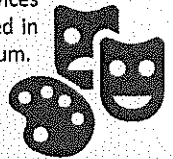
These may be either:

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

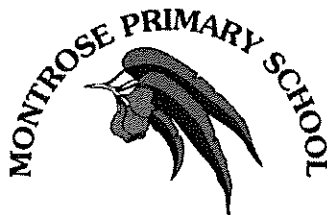
Support for families experiencing hardship is available at every school and each school has a parent payment contact person. See your school's policy for more information.

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



Parent Payment Policy

Purpose of this policy

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

Please note: this policy should be read in conjunction with the "Parent Payment Policy and Implementation" Guide attached to this policy.

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

- All requests for payment will include clear specification of the Item, description and costs within the three payment categories.
- Fully itemised lists of essential education items are available on the school's web site and upon request at the office
- Requests for payment will include a brief description of how the payment will support/enrich the school's learning/teaching program

This table describes the three parent payment categories:

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)• activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend i.e. travel, entry fees or accommodation associated with camps, excursions and incursions., <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, activities or services that are optional and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. 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. These items include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• camps, excursions, incursions and sports

Category	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • instructional support material, resources and administration in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. student computer printing for personal use) • extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. instrumental music) • 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 program and higher cost alternatives which may be more desirable (e.g. the use of more expensive materials) • 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).
Voluntary financial contributions	<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.

A parent payment categories flowchart is included with this policy.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

Many payment methods are available: payment may be made by cash, cheque, credit card (including credit card payment over the telephone), Eftpos, direct deposit or BPay (contact the office for individual details).

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

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

- the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which is available for eligible families, to cover the costs of school trips, camps and sporting activities
- access to State Schools Relief Committee support via the principal to assist with clothing/uniforms
- 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.

PLEASE NOTE: 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 further payment plans.

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 Sue Guthrie to discuss alternative payment methods.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

Montrose Primary School is always prepared to support families experiencing hardship.

Admin Manager – Sue Guthrie, is our school's 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. Depending on their circumstances, a number of options are available:

- Payment plans
- Financial Hardship Fund – this fund's sole purpose is to provide financial assistance to families experiencing hardship
- Support agencies

Note: in reflecting on the school's hardship arrangements, schools could consider their proactive strategies to engage with parents disconnected from the school who may be experiencing hardship, such as discretely approaching families who may need support and special payment arrangements.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

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 the item and which of the three parent payment categories it relates to
- 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 Admin Manager if the parent wishes to discuss these
- a copy of the school-level policy is on the School's web site and available upon request.

- All requests for money will include a statement: *Parents are welcome to contact the office regarding payment requests for optional activities. Alternative payment options are generally available. Refer to the 'Parent Payment Policy' for detailed information on payment of optional activities.*

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- School Council is responsible to monitor the implementation of the policy. Transparency of processes and engagement with parents is important. The policy will be reported back to the school community via the newsletter and school review. Any updates to the policy will be reviewed and ratified by School Council – it will be reviewed annually at the first School Council meeting after the AGM.

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.

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

Ratified at School Council: 20th February 2018

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

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