



# Parent Payments & Voluntary Contributions Policy

## Purpose of this policy

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 Essential Learning Standards (VELS) 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 itemised 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. For example if parents/guardians choose for their children not to attend a compulsory excursion/camp an alternative option needs to be provided.

- the status and details of any payments or non-payments are confidential
- parents are provided with early notice of payment requests (e.g. a minimum of six weeks notice prior to the end of the previous school year)
- 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
<b>Essential education items</b>	<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"> <li>• materials that the individual student takes possession of, such as text books and student stationery</li> <li>• materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. home economics, photography, catering)</li> <li>• school uniform (where applicable)</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul> <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>

Category	Description
<b>Optional extras</b>	<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"> <li>• instructional support material, resources and administration in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. student computer printing for personal use)</li> <li>• extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. instrumental music)</li> <li>• school-based performances, productions and events</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• materials and services offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. school magazines)</li> <li>• 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).</li> </ul>
<b>Voluntary financial contributions</b>	<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"> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• 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</li> <li>• general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school.</li> </ul>

A parent payment categories flowchart is attached to the end of this policy.

## 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 clothing/uniforms
- 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.

***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.***

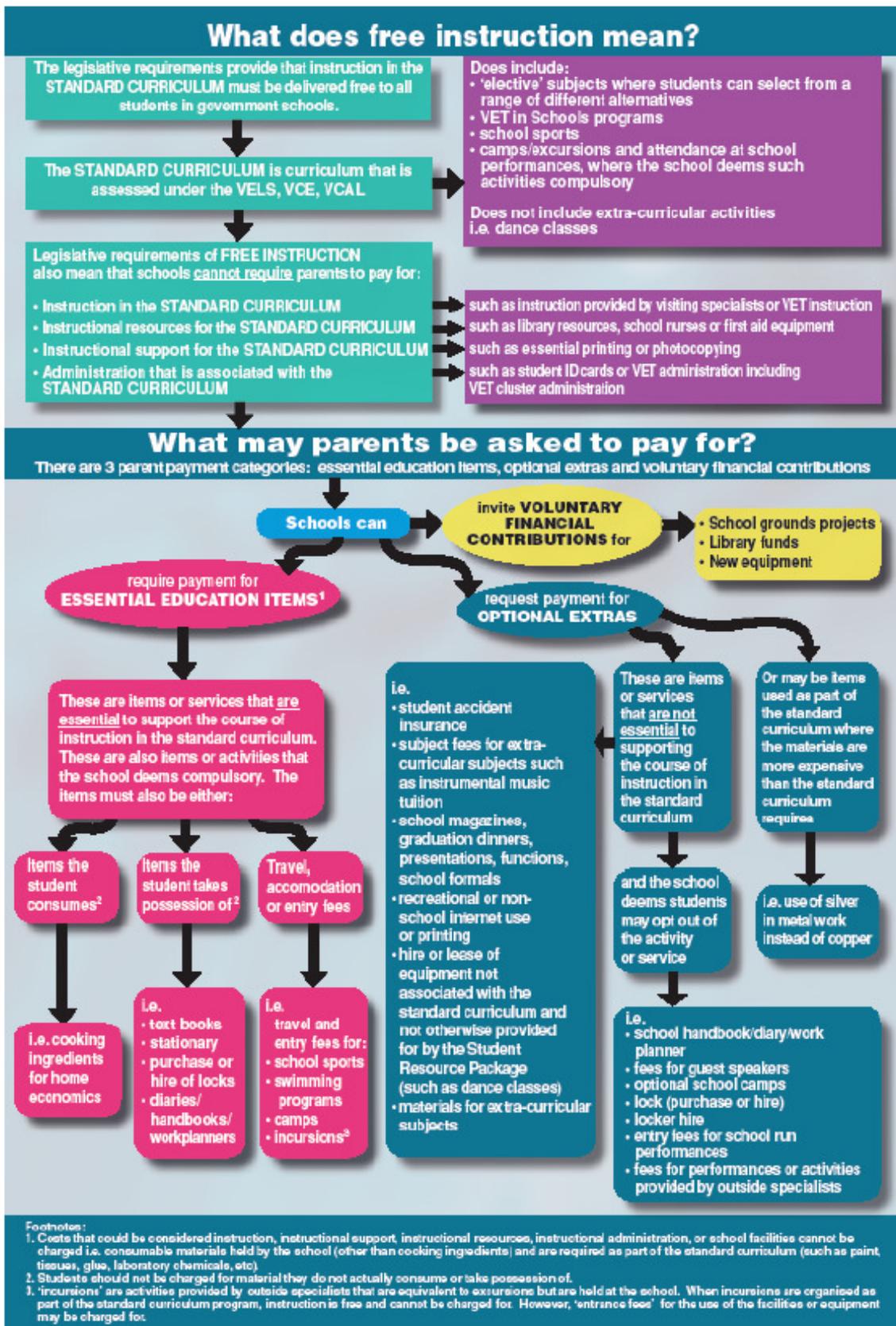
Principals are encouraged to explore ways to make quality second-hand books and uniforms available to parents in need.

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 other nominated senior staff member to discuss alternative payment methods.

### Related legislation

*Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Sections 2.2.4.(1), 2.3.6 (1)(c), 2.2

# Parent Payment Categories Flowchart



**Footnotes:**

1. Costs that could be considered instruction, instructional support, instructional resources, instructional administration, or school facilities cannot be charged i.e. consumable materials held by the school (other than cooking ingredients) and are required as part of the standard curriculum (such as paint, tissues, glue, laboratory chemicals, etc)

2. Students should not be charged for material they do not actually consume or take possession of.

3. 'incursions' are activities provided by outside specialists that are equivalent to excursions but are held at the school. When incursions are organised as part of the standard curriculum program, instruction is free and cannot be charged for. However, 'entrance fees' for the use of the facilities or equipment may be charged for.

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

Ratified at School Council: 21st March 2017

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