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** 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.

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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.
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 invite Voluntary Financial Contributions for**

- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)
- Voluntary contributions for a specific purpose, such as equipment, materials, services.
- General voluntary contributions

**Items the student purchases or hires**

- e.g. school magazines, class photos
- functions, formal, 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
## PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential student learning items</strong></td>
<td>These are items, activities or services that the school deems essential to student learning in the standard curriculum. Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase items through the school or provide their own. Examples are:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- items that the student takes temporary or permanent possession of such as text books, student stationery, book bags</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished articles (e.g. technology projects, art projects, workbooks, photography)</td>
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<td>- school uniform (where applicable)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend, such as costs associated with excursions and incursions. Note: If parents choose to provide equivalent materials themselves, this must 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) that, due to their nature, can only be provided by the school.</td>
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**Optional items**

These are items or services that are optional and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students may access these on a user pays basis. These items include:

- activities the student purchases (e.g. fees for extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum such as instrumental music tuition; fees for guest speakers; optional camps and excursions; entry fees to school-based performances, productions and events)

- items the student purchases or hires (e.g. school magazines; class photos; formals/graduation functions; materials for extracurricular activities; student accident insurance)

- items and materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum (e.g. use of silver in metal work instead of copper)

**Voluntary financial contributions**

Parents, or anyone else, can be invited to make a voluntary contribution or donation to the school for the following purposes:
**Category** | **Description**
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- | 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. These contributions are NOT tax deductible.
- | general voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school. These contributions or donations are NOT tax deductible.
- | donations to a building fund or library fund (if these funds have been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office and have a Deductible Gift Recipients (DGR) status). Donations to these funds ARE tax deductible to the donor.
- | any donations to special schools with a DGR status are also tax deductible to the donor.

✅ At Montrose Primary School we have always had an exceptional level of support for parent payment requests, which we believe reflects the parent satisfaction of the learning and teaching programs on offer. The school provides an extensive curriculum offering in both the general classroom learning and specialist subjects including Art, Physical Education, LOTE(Chinese), Music and Drama. Parent payment support allows the school to deliver the Victorian Curriculum based programs in a manner that maximises learning opportunities through engaging, well-resourced and high quality curriculum delivery for all students.

✅ In addition we offer many additional items or services that are based on a user pay system that further enrich children's learning and development.

**PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS**

Montrose Primary School accepts cash, cheque, credit card, EFTPOS, BPay and direct deposit.

Letters requesting parent payments for student materials will be distributed to families six weeks before the end of the year. The school will give clear specifications of the Items; description and costs within the three payment categories. Payment may be requested but not required prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials are to be used.

All camp/excursion/incursion notices will be handed to students clearly specifying due dates. Notes for camps and more costly activities will be handed out with as much notice as possible to allow payment by instalment.

**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.**

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.

- 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 (unless camp/excursion/incursion payment is due and no contact has been made).
- 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.

**FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS**

There are support options available for parents experiencing difficulty in making payments including:

- the CSEF (Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund), which is available for eligible families, to cover the costs of school excursions, camps and sporting activities
- State Schools Relief (applied for via the principal) to assist with clothing/uniforms
- Second hand uniform shop
- Welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools to provide further assistance to students and their families.

Families 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.

**CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP**

Where families have difficulty making payments, Sue at the office will discuss with them the range of support options available, and negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement, such as payment by instalments.

Parents/guardians who experience difficulties providing or paying the school to provide essential education items, should be encouraged to make an appointment with Sue at the office to discuss alternative payment methods.

**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**

All communication with parents/guardians, including payment requests, will be fair and reasonable.

Where possible all notices will be displayed on the school’s web site.

The parent payment policy and all policies relevant to parents will be displayed on the school’s web site.

Payment requests and charges must be accompanied by the following information:

- details of what parents are being asked to pay for and when relevant a due by date
- when parents are required to provide essential education items for their children, they have the option of purchasing these through the school or through a local supplier, where appropriate

All parents are welcome to contact Sue at the office if they need to raise any issues, make general inquiries about charges or make a complaint. Alternative payment options are generally available and the parent should contact Sue at the office if they wish to discuss these.
MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

✓ The School Council in conjunction with the Finance sub-committee work strategically to implement the Parent Payment Policy. The Parent Payment Policy will be reviewed every year at a School Council level unless there is a need to do so earlier based on department requirements.
✓ The Parent Payment Policy is made available to all parents through a number of avenues.
✓ Any changes to the policy will be notified to the school community and the new policy made available.
✓ The School Council through its Finance subcommittee annually review the setting of Parent Payment request amounts based on trends in passed monies received, socio/economic knowledge of our community and the costs of delivering a curriculum that meets the needs of our school community. Parent payment requests are set at a cost reasonable for the majority of our families with a provision of support avenues for those in need.
✓ Our School Council and Finance committee have both parent and teacher members and are representative of and remain in touch with our community needs.
✓ Parent Payment requests are reported to the school community within at least 6 weeks of requested payment dates. Parents are reminded annually about how to access the current Parent Payment policy which outlines avenues of support.

Date of approval by School Council: 18th October 2016
Date of review: First school council meeting after the AGM annually