

Policy – Parent Payments – DET policy

This policy outlines the ways in which school councils can request payments or voluntary contributions from parents and ensures that parent payment practices in schools are consistent, transparent and that all children have access to the standard curriculum.

Summary

- All students in Victorian government schools must have free access to instruction that is offered by a school to fulfil the curriculum requirements in the eight key learning areas of the Victorian Curriculum F-10, the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).
- School councils can only request payments from parents under 3 categories: Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items and Voluntary Contributions.
- Schools must consider the Financial Help for Families Policy and make arrangements for families who are experiencing financial hardship and unable to make payments.
- Schools must have their parent payment arrangements approved by their school council and uploaded onto their public websites.
- Schools cannot:
 - deny students access to the standard curriculum program, refuse instruction or disadvantage students on the basis of payments not being made for education items or activities
 - request payments from parents for school operating costs (for example, utility costs) or general and unspecified charges (for example, subject levies)

Details

Schools and school councils must adhere to the Parent Payments Policy which is outlined as follows.

Free instruction

All students in Victorian government schools must have free access to instruction that is offered by a school to fulfil the standard curriculum requirements in the 8 key learning areas:

1. English
2. Mathematics
3. Sciences (including physics, chemistry and biology)
4. Humanities and social sciences (including history, geography, economics, business, civics and citizenship)
5. The arts
6. Languages

7. Health and physical education
8. Information and communication technology and design and technology.

Free instruction includes 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.

Schools cannot deny students access to the standard curriculum program, refuse instruction or disadvantage students on the basis of payments not being made for education items or activities. Schools cannot withhold student access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payments being made.

Parent payment categories

School councils can only request payments from parents under 3 categories:

1. Essential Student Learning Items

Essential Student Learning Items are items and activities which the school deems as essential for student learning, without which, students would be unable to access the school's delivery of the standard curriculum.

Where practical and appropriate, parents may choose to purchase essential items through the school or provide their own. Where a child cannot provide an essential student learning item or participate in an essential activity, the school must make alternative arrangements e.g. make the item available through the school or provide alternative financial support options.

Essential Student Learning Items do not include:

- school operating costs (refer to School operating costs in the Guidance tab)
- generic subject levies or fees
- non-curriculum related costs
- unspecified charges

Schools must be able to justify why an item or activity has been categorised as an Essential Student Learning Item.

2. Optional Items

Optional Items are items and activities that enhance or broaden the schooling experience of students and are offered in addition to the standard curriculum. Students access these on a user pays basis.

Optional Items include non-curriculum-based school events, optional excursions and camps, optional sporting or music programs and materials that don't relate to the standard curriculum such as school magazines.

3. Voluntary Contributions

School councils can invite parents to make a voluntary contribution to support the school. Voluntary Contributions can be for general or clearly explained specific purposes that relate to the school council's functions and objectives. Where a Voluntary Contribution is requested for a specific purpose, the funds may only be used for that purpose.

There are no obligations on parents to make any Voluntary Contributions and schools cannot refuse students instruction in the standard curriculum if their parents do not contribute.

Financial help for families

Schools have a commitment and responsibility to be responsive to parents who may be experiencing either short-term or long-term financial hardship.

Schools must:

- ensure costs to parents are kept to a minimum and made affordable for families
- consider the Financial Help for Families Policy and make arrangements for families who are experiencing financial hardship and unable to make payments for their child
- nominate a parent payment contact person(s) to support families with parent payment arrangements

Refer to Financial Help for Families for further information.

School's parent payment arrangements

Schools do not need to develop their own school-level parent payment policy. However, schools should develop their own parent payment arrangements that suit their local context.

Parent payment arrangements include the school's:

- payment requests to parents for items and activities. Items and activities must be clearly specified, accurately costed and itemised using the 3 categories
- financial support options for parents experiencing financial hardship
- payment methods

Schools must:

- have their parent payment arrangements approved by their school council prior to communicating it to parents

- upload their parent payment arrangements onto their school website for transparency (refer to Uploading parent payment arrangements onto the school website in the Guidance tab)

Schools must use the Parent Payment Arrangements Template to develop arrangements and communicate these to parents.

Definitions

Standard curriculum

Standard curriculum is the Victorian Curriculum F-10, Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL).

Related policies

- Finance Manual — Financial Management for Schools
- Financial Help for Families
- Personal Devices — Access
- School Council — Powers and Functions
- Student Dress Code
- Students with Disability

Relevant legislation

- Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)
- Education Training and Reform Act 2006 (Vic)