

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

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

Schools can invite



e.g.

- Building or Library fund (Tax deductible)

Bridgewater Primary School

Parent Payment Policy 2021

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

School council requests payments from parents, within the DET guidelines, for the following three categories:

Essential education items

These are items which parents are **required** to provide or pay Bridgewater Primary School to provide for their child. These items include:

- ❖ Student requisites required to be used by students. Supplies are purchased in bulk for each child and are specific to their year level. The school organises for bulk purchase of these items during Term 4 for the upcoming year. If parents would like to source and purchase these supplies for their child/ren, a list will be available from the office.
- ❖ Materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finalised articles. This incorporates supplies and resources for all key learning areas, including specialist areas such as Art, Library, Science, Cooking and LOTE. These items are purchased at competitive rates by the school through bulk orders where possible.
- ❖ Transport and entrance for excursions and incursions which all students are expected to attend. These activities support the curriculum at each year level.

Optional extras

These are the programs that are offered on a user-pays basis which parents may **choose** to access for their child/ren. These items include:

- ❖ Extra-curricular programs or activities offered in addition to the standard curriculum program (e.g. instrumental music tuition)
- ❖ 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 costs 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)

Voluntary financial contributions

These are contributions which parents may be **invited** to donate to Bridgewater Primary School.

Bridgewater Primary School may invite voluntary financial contributions for the following purposes:

- ❖ Contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school (e.g. equipment, materials or service) in addition to those funded through the SRP. This may include additional computers or student-related services
- ❖ Buildings and Grounds development and maintenance
- ❖ General voluntary financial contributions or donations to the school

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

This policy ensures that:

- ❖ Parents/guardians are advised of the Parent Payment schedule at least six weeks before payment is required.
- ❖ The payment schedule shall take the shape of a Parent Payment Form, accompanied by a letter signed by the Principal and School Council President. It will include itemized details relating to all payments, essential payment dates, options to make payments by instalments, clear definitions of the category of any payments and a statement printed from CASES21.
- ❖ The status and details of any payments or non-payments by parents/guardians are strictly confidential
- ❖ Parents/guardians are informed of alternative payment options and invited to contact the Principal, or delegate if they wish to discuss these options.
- ❖ All requests for payment are fair and reasonable.
- ❖ In the event of a non-payment for an optional item (e.g. excursions/camp) a student shall not be permitted to access this activity or resource without prior approval of the Principal. The student shall be provided with an alternative option for the duration of the school hours covered by the excursion/camp if the non-payment of same results in the student being excluded.

- ❖ All staff are aware of this policy and adhere to it.
- ❖ Access to the standard curriculum program and enrolment or advancement to the next year level is not withheld as a condition of payment.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

- ❖ Second hand uniforms via the Parents Club uniform cupboard
- ❖ Camps, Sports and Excursion Fund (CSEF) for all eligible families
- ❖ State Schools Relief for all eligible families
- ❖ Local community support in the form of donations from various organisations, and also fundraising by the parents club helps to offset costs related to school camp another "big ticket" items

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

Bridgewater Primary School will provide support to parents/guardians experiencing hardship.

This will occur by:

- ❖ Providing a nominated Parent Payment Contact Person that parents can communicate with by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.
- ❖ Providing access to meetings and open communication with parents experiencing hardship.
- ❖ The Principal and Parent Payment Contact Person must ensure that all payment records are kept confidential.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

Bridgewater recognizes that it is extremely important to provide effective communication strategies to all.

This will occur by:

- ❖ Providing a nominated Parent Payment Contact Person that parents can communicate with by phone, email or in person about their financial situation and related difficulties in making payments.
- ❖ Invoices for unpaid **essential items or optional items** will not be sent more than once a month. Statements are available to all families at all times and can be accessed by making a request of the Business Manager at the office.
- ❖ Only the initial invitation for **voluntary financial contributions** and one reminder notice to be sent to all parents/guardians.
- ❖ The Principal is available at any time for discussion about financial situations.
- ❖ **Essential items** are provided for the child/ren. If parents/guardians choose to provide items themselves, this should be done in consultation with the school, as items should meet the specifications provided by the school. There may be certain times that, due to their nature, may only be provided by the school.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

School Council will ensure that:

- ❖ The Parents Payment Policy is reviewed as part of the school's annual review cycle.
- ❖ The Parents Payment Policy is reviewed and endorsed annually, however no later than the end of October of the year proceeding the year of the required payments.
- ❖ Parent payments are kept to a minimum and will not exceed the cost of the relevant materials or services to the student.

Signed: _____

Principal

Signed: _____

School Council President

Date Ratified: _____