PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Overport 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 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. 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:

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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.
**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?
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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.

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**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.

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**What principles govern parent payment practice?**
- Educational Value
- Access, Equity & Inclusion
- Affordability
- Engagement & Support
- Respect & Confidentiality
- Transparency & Accountability

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**Parents** | What may parents be asked to pay for?
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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:
  - 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

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Parents can be asked to pay for items, activities and services in the three Parent Payment Categories:
- Essential Student Learning Items
- Optional Items
- Voluntary Financial Contributions

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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

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Schools 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

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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
Overport Primary School
Parent Payment Policy

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES
Overport Primary School Council will annually review parent payments requested to ensure they are in line with Department of Education & Training guidelines. Charges will be clearly itemized, costed and categorized as Essential Student Learning, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.

Parent contribution requests will be made in line with the principles of Educational value; Access, equity and inclusion; Affordability; Engagement and Support, Respect and Confidentiality; Transparency and Accountability.

Parent contributions will be requested to assist the school in providing an enhanced teaching and learning program for every student in line with the school priorities.

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS
Parents will be provided with early notification of annual payment requests (a minimum of 6 weeks prior to the commencement of the school year). Reasonable notice will be given for any other payment requests during the year (i.e. excursions).

Parents will be permitted to make payments in instalments, and be provided with several methods of making payment including, cash, cheque or direct deposit. Parents are able to enter into confidential payment arrangements by contacting the Business Manager (Vivienne Robinson) on 9783 8777 or robinson.vivienne.e@edumail.vic.gov.au.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS
There are a number of support options available for parents including but not limited to;

- Second hand uniform if available at the Office.
- Camps, Sports & Excursion Funding (CSEF) available to eligible parents
- State Schools Relief support available for uniforms/footwear/calculators/textbooks (apply with the Assistant Principal, Deborah Madder)
- Centrepay – a government initiative, whereby parents can elect to have a small amount paid to the school, on their behalf, on a regular fortnightly basis, from any Centrelink or Family tax benefit payments.

Information regarding support options is available from the general office and will be advertised periodically in the Newsletter and on the website.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP
The school understands that families may experience financial difficulties or hardship at times and may be unable to meet full or part payments requested. Families are invited to contact the Business Manager to make payment arrangements or alternatively can contact the Assistant Principal for a confidential discussion and information regarding support options.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES
The Parent Payment Policy and Implementation will be published on the school website.

General enquiries regarding parent charges may be made to the office on 9783 8777. Concerns should be directed in the first instance to the Business Manager.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY
The School Council (via the Finance Committee) will conduct an annual review of the implementation of the Parent Payment Policy including addressing any concerns raised by the school community. Any changes to the Policy Implementation will be reported back to the community via notice on the schools website and report in the schools Newsletter.

Date of approval by School Council
Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools

Frequently Asked Questions for Schools

Some parents believe that public education is free. What is free in government schools?

Victorian legislation clearly states that instruction in the standard curriculum program must be provided free of charge to all students in Victorian government schools.

‘Free instruction’ is the teaching staff, administration and the provision of facilities in connection with instruction of the standard curriculum program, including reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities.

How can I explain why schools can charge parent payments?

Schools are funded to deliver a quality education based on the standard curriculum and receive additional government funds based on the individual needs of their students or location.

However, the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 allows school councils to set their own payments in accordance with Department of Education and Training policy, as each school serves a different community with different needs and expectations for the curriculum.

Schools can request payments to cover costs for the learning programs they decide to offer based on the needs and aspirations of their community.

Can I charge for the administration of the standard curriculum program?

No. The costs associated with the administration and coordination of the standard curriculum program are considered part of free instruction and must not be passed onto parents.

These items include:

- items which students take temporary or permanent possession of, including textbooks, student stationary and school uniforms (where applicable)
- materials for learning and teaching where students construct, consume or take possession of the finished articles (for example, home economics, ceramics, photography, materials for build-your-own-kits)
- activities that all students are expected to attend (for example, transport and entrance costs).
WHAT IS THE STANDARD CURRICULUM PROGRAM?

The standard curriculum program is made up of the eight key learning areas agreed to by the States, Territories and Commonwealth. These areas are: the arts, English, health and physical education, languages other than English, mathematics, science, and technologies.

The standard curriculum also includes the four capability areas: Critical and Creative Thinking, Intercultural, Ethical, and Personal and Social.

To clarify, 'the standard curriculum for years F-10' means the 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.

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPLAIN TO PARENTS WHY PAYMENT REQUESTS DIFFER ACROSS SCHOOLS

All schools are different and each school has the ability to set its own priorities. Therefore, it is common for schools to request different payments from parents because they offer different learning programs, go on different excursions and have different needs at school.

For example, some schools might want to start a student gardening program and others a photography program. Each program clearly has unique requirements and could lead to different parent payments.

In line with the principles of the Parent Payment Policy, schools should make parent payment decisions in good faith and in the best interests of their students. Schools must also keep costs to a minimum so that they are reasonable and affordable to most parents at the school.

In setting parent payments, schools must ensure that parents clearly understand the links between the school's learning programs and the payments being requested. They must also understand that there are support options available for families experiencing hardship.

HOW DOES FREE INSTRUCTION APPLY TO SENIOR SECONDARY CERTIFICATES SUCH AS VCE AND VCAL, INCLUDING VET IN SCHOOLS PROGRAMS?

Free instruction includes senior secondary certificates that form part of the standard curriculum program. These include certificates such as VCE and VCAL. VET in Schools programs are also part of VCE and VCAL and therefore instruction is free.

Schools cannot charge for anything that could be considered teaching supports, administration or school facilities required to deliver instruction in the standard curriculum.

If a student consumes or takes temporary or permanent possession of an item/service that supports free instruction in the standard curriculum program, this is an Essential Student Learning Item (ESLI), for which payment may be sought.

For example, payment could be sought for the purchase of materials for a VET program, such as wood for making a standard/agreed item in VET furnishing.

HOW ARE THE ESSENTIAL STUDENT LEARNING ITEMS PURCHASED?

Schools will offer to purchase these items on behalf of parents, although parents have the option of purchasing equivalent materials from other sources.

Any Essential Student Learning Item must be accurately costed and affordable for most families at the school. This must be considered when determining parent payment charges.

Schools should also outline what materials can be purchased elsewhere and the specifications that need to be met. Some items, for example food provisions for home economics, may be provided by the school only, but this must be made clear in Parent Payment charge forms.
WHAT ARE THE OPTIONAL ITEMS?
Optional items are items or services that are offered in addition to the standard curriculum.

These items are provided on a user-pays basis and if parents choose to access them for their child they will be required to pay for them.

These items include:
- items the student purchases or hires such as school magazines, class photos, fees for guest speakers, functions, formals and student accident insurance
- activities the student purchases such as fees for extra-curricular programs or activities such as instrumental music tuition
- items and materials that are more expensive than required to meet the standard curriculum (for example, requesting payment for the use of mahogany in woodwork instead of the standard pine).

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS REQUEST PARENTS TO MAKE VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR?
Schools may invite voluntary financial contributions for the following.
- Contributions to a building or a library fund. These are contributions that have been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) are tax deductible.
- Contributions for a specific purpose identified by the school; for example, equipment, materials or services in addition to those funded through the Student Resource Package. This may include additional computers or student-related services.
- general voluntary contributions.

CAN SCHOOLS CHARGE LEVIES AS PART OF PARENT PAYMENTS?
Yes, but it must be clear what category the levy belongs to and what it will be used for.

Levies cannot be charged for items, activities or services that are classified as part of free instruction.

Schools should not bundle together elements that would be individually classified as essential, optional or a voluntary financial contribution into one levy.

HOW SHOULD SCHOOLS RESPOND TO PARENTS WHO ARE UNABLE TO PAY THE CHARGES BECAUSE OF HARDSHIP?
All schools understand that families can experience financial difficulty or a crisis which makes payment difficult. The principal must nominate a parent payment contact person, with whom parents can discuss their situation and make alternative payment arrangements.

The name and contact details of the parent payment contact people must be available in the school’s Parent Payment Policy and Implementation and must be easily located on the school’s website as well as on display at the school’s reception.

The parent payment contact person for that student’s family should proactively engage the family to determine whether hardship or financial difficulty are factors in non-payment; if this is the case, hardship arrangements must be made available.

Alternative arrangements must be available for any student who is unable to provide or participate in an Essential Student Learning Item/activity. This ensures that all students learn the required knowledge and skills.

Principals must ensure any record of payments or contributions is kept confidential. Only de-identified information can be provided for reporting purposes.

CAN A SCHOOL MAKE REPEATED REQUESTS FOR VOLUNTARY FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS?
No. Requests for voluntary financial contributions are limited to the initial notice to all parents and guardians and one reminder notice only.

Prior to sending out any reminder notices to parents, schools are to use their discretion with families where there may be financial difficulty or hardship.
WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR FAMILIES HAVING FINANCIAL DIFFICULTY?

Schools must communicate information to families about the support options available, including:

- Access to State Schools' Relief Committee support for clothing/uniforms (via the principal).
- The Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund, which provides payments for eligible students to attend camps, sports and excursions.

For a full range of support options, see: Cost support for families

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, see: Parent Payment Policy - detailing the Department's policy

For information specific to your child's school contact the school directly or contact your regional office, see: Regional Offices