



## Parent Payments Policy (Including School Specific Procedures)

Latest DET Update: 29/07/2019  
First Developed in this Format: October 2019

### 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 parents<sup>1</sup> 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.



**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:

### **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 |**

Bayside P-12 College council consider the proposed requests for parent payments. The cost is kept to a minimum and is affordable to most parents at the college.

#### **Bayside P-12 College ensures that:**

- items students consume or take possession of are accurately costed
- payment requests are broadly itemised within the appropriate category



## Bayside P-12 College

- 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. Our Principal and school council 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 able to contact the college administration where they can discuss payment arrangement options.



# 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 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](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

Schools can 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



## Bayside P-12 College

### College Specific Procedures |

Bayside P-12 College Council will:

- make every effort to keep costs to a minimum and ensure parent payment policy is fair and equitable
- provide parents/carers with as much notice as possible regarding payments due
- provide parents/carers with a number of payment options and support families facing financial difficulty

### Parent payment charges |

Bayside P-12 College Parent Payment Lists will reflect DET Policy and be categorised as follows:

1. Voluntary Contributions
  2. Essential Student Learning Items
  3. Optional Items
- Payments and contributions will be kept to a minimum and subject to the 'free instruction' provision to ensure charges do not exceed the cost of providing the relevant materials or services to our students.
  - Students in Year 7 to Year 12 will be part of the 'Bring your own Designated Device' Program. This program provides families with the opportunity to purchase, maintain and care for their own device.
  - Students in Year 7 to Year 10 will be provided with eBooks via access to Champion Education. The cost for this access will form part of the Essential Student Learning Items fee.
  - All students will have access to the standard curriculum program.
  - No student will be denied access to the standard curriculum program on the basis of non-payment for educational items or services.
  - Families will be requested to make payment of the Essential Student Learning amount listed on the appropriate Parent Payment List for their child's year level. Amounts will vary based on programs/goods/services provided
  - Subject fees will only be requested to cover the cost of the provision of materials to be used personally by the student, where the student consumes or takes possession of the finalized articles, for high costs alternative subjects and various school based performances, events, camps and excursions.
  - All payments will be clearly listed on the Parent Payments Lists distributed with the booklists in December.
  - Each payment will be listed in the appropriate category and have a clear definition of the payment to ensure families understand what they are paying for.
  - Parents/carers who hold a Pension/Health Care Card will be offered funding support under the Camps, Sport and Excursion Funding (CSEF). For primary students Foundation (Prep) to Year 6, this will be \$125 and secondary students (Year 7- Year 12) \$225.
  - Parents/carers experiencing severe financial difficulties will be offered support via the Welfare staff on each campus.
  - Submissions for assistance are managed by the SWC staff at each campus from State School's Relief, Champion Education Student Hardship (eBooks) and from Dobson's Uniforms community assistance package.
  - Payment Plans are available on-line via Compass for all families.



## Bayside P-12 College

- Students who are experiencing financial hardship may apply for the use of a second hand laptop through consultation with their SWC Office.

### Parent arrangements and methods |

- Payments may be made via Compass using credit card or campus office using cash/credit card
- Instalment payments may be arranged with college administration

### Refunds |

- Bayside P-12 College Council will consider requests for partial or full refunds of payments made by parents on a case-by-case basis taking into account the individual circumstances. Generally we will not be able to refund payments made for items purchased or costs that have already been paid where those funds have been transferred to a third party. For example, camp costs when a child becomes unwell and cannot attend in circumstances where the payment has already been made or committed to a third party and no refund is available to the college. Where possible, we will make this clear to parents at the time of payment.

### Engaging with parents |

- Bayside P-12 College Council will engage in effective communication with the college community and have strategies in place to ensure we are aware of and understand the needs and views of parents.

### Family support options |

- CSEF
- State Schools Relief
- Local community supports

### Consideration of hardship |

The College will be proactive in dealing with hardship and will endeavour to identify families experiencing difficulty through teachers and other appropriate strategies regularly used by the College.

Where families have difficulty making payments, the Principal/Campus Principal will encourage parents/carers to make an appointment to discuss with them the range of support options available, and to negotiate an appropriate alternative arrangement, such as payment by instalments, obtaining support from State Schools Relief, accessing the Camps, Sports & Excursions Fund and welfare and support agencies that have established partnership arrangements with schools.

The Principal/Campus Principal will also explore ways in which quality second-hand uniforms could be made available to families.



## Bayside P-12 College

Decisions about how to manage non-payment of essential items or optional extras will be made by the Principal/Campus Principal on a case-by-case basis.

This hardship consideration statement will be communicated to parents/carers clearly and in a timely manner.

All parents/carers will be provided with the name and contact details (phone number and email address) of a nominated College Contact Person at each campus.

The person/s nominated to fulfil this role at Bayside P-12 College will be the Student Welfare Co-ordinators (SWC) at each campus who are trained in how to assist families experiencing financial hardship. Parents/carers will be assured that their child/children will have access to the educational opportunities being offered by the College.

The SWC undertaking this function will do so with sensitivity, respect and understanding to ensure she/he is responsive to families' needs.

It is not acceptable to use coercion or harass parents/carers to obtain payment.

Under no circumstances will collectors of any type, including debt collectors, be used by the College to obtain any funds from parents/carers.

The SWC will have authority to use their discretion and make alternative payment arrangements such as:

- waiving of fees
- reduced fees
- deferred payment
- flexible payment plans
- cost saving options such as substituting one item for another, using resources that can be loaned from the school
- referral to government and/or community assistance programs

When discussing payment and support options with parents/carers, the parent payment contact person is required by DET to:

- allow parents/carers to be accompanied by a support person or community advocate if they choose to do so
- explain to parents/carers that the learning and teaching program builds on the free instruction in the standard curriculum and outline how parent payments support educational outcomes
- outline that the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* empowers school councils to charge fees to parents/carers for goods and services made available or provided by the school to a child of the parent (section 2.3.6(c))
- assure parents/carers that their children will be supported to participate in learning activities regardless of the family's inability to pay
- enable parents/carers to nominate a payment and/or schedule they can afford
- provide information on the supports available, including government assistance programs, legal and/or financial counselling and assistance from local community and welfare organisations and refer parents/carers where applicable
- abide by the hardship policy principles in the practice and delivery of hardship support to families
- abide by principles of good practice in this policy

The SWC is expected to be aware of and inform families of any second-hand options available for materials and resources commonly required by students, e.g. uniforms, textbooks, calculators and stationery, and encourage and explore ways to make quality second-hand books and uniforms available to parents/carers in need.



## Bayside P-12 College

Please refer to the School Specific Procedures for the measures that Bayside P-12 College already has in place to assist families.

The College will assess where there may be barriers to learning and participation for students on the basis of financial hardship. DET aims to assist schools to ensure their activities and procedures are sensitive to low income families.

### Communication with families |

- The Principal and College Council are responsible for approving payments by parent/carers.
- The college will ensure that all communication with parents/carers, including payment requests, is fair and reasonable. Payment requests, letters or CASES21 invoices for student materials and services charges will be accompanied via following information -
  - a description of each of the three parent payment categories
  - details of the materials and activities parents/carers are being asked to pay for
  - that parents/carers are required to provide Essential Student Learning 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 school contact person if the parent wishes to discuss the payments further
- A copy of the Parent Payment Policy will be posted on the website.

### Monitoring and review of the implementation of the policy |

- The Principal as Executive Officer of School Council, will ensure that the school-level policy complies with the DET's policy and that all staff are familiar with and adhere to it.
- The College will ensure that:
  - the administrative and financial processes are compliant with DET requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.
  - invoices for unpaid Essential Student Learning Items or optional items accepted by parents/carers 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/carers
  - receipts are issued to parents/carers immediately upon payment and receipted on CASES 21.
- All documentation relating to individual parent payments will be kept confidential and in a secure location. It will be accessible only to the Principal/Campus Principal, Business Manager and other nominated staff.
- If in doubt, for the most frequently asked questions, the Principal will refer to DET's website Frequently Asked Questions and other resources such as Costs and Financial Assistance, Finance.
- In the event of a parent complaint, the College will refer to the *Complaints & Concerns, Parents/Carers Policy*.
- Please refer also to the *Personal Devices – Parent Payments Policy* and the *Financial Management Policy* and to other links on the DET website below.



## Bayside P-12 College

- The college 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 college community.
- The full Parent Payment Policy is available from the DET [School Policy and Advisory Guide](#).
- Answers to the most commonly asked questions about school costs for parents see: [Frequently Asked Questions – For Parents](#)

**Date of approval by College Council | 18/09/2019**