

PARENT PAYMENT POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Bentleigh Secondary College

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

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.

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 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

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

Bentleigh Secondary College

Parent Payment Policy

The Victorian Government's *Parent Payments in Victorian Government Schools* policy anticipates the creation of a parent Payment Policy at the Individual School level:

PARENT PAYMENT CHARGES

Essential Student Learning Items:

These are items, activities or services that the school deems essential to student learning of the standard curriculum. Parents and guardians are **required** to provide, or pay the school to provide for their child.

- *Items the student takes temporary or permanent possession of (e.g. text books; digital workbooks; stationary; student ID cards; lockers; locks; computer devices associated with our 2017 & 2018 One to One notebook program; communications systems; IT services; technology projects, build-your own kits, dioramas; materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes or takes possession of the finished article).*
- *Activities associated with instruction that all students are expected to attend (e.g. excursions; incursions; school sports/carnivals; camps; guest speakers).*

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.

- *Items the student purchases or hires (e.g. school magazines; class photo; materials for extracurricular programs; student accident insurance).*
- *Activities the student purchases (e.g. fees for extracurricular programs or activities, such as instrumental music tuition; sports academy; fees for guest speakers; camps, excursions, incursions, sports; functions, formals, entry fees for school run performances).*
- *Items and/or materials that are more expensive and required to meet the standard curriculum (e.g. use of silver in metalwork instead of copper; supplementary exam revision guides).*

Note: *Students will not be considered for participation in (optional items-activities the student purchases) extra curriculum program: instrumental music program; sports academy, functions, formals and activities, interstate or overseas tours or exchange until all parent payments for the Essential Student Learning items have been paid in full.*

Voluntary Financial Contribution:

- *Schools can invite Voluntary Financial Contributions (e.g. College resources-equipment/furniture repairs & maintenance; Student support-numeracy, literacy support; Grounds-in lieu of working bees; Building Fund-Tax Deductable).*

PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS AND METHODS

- Essential Student Learning Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions paid as part of Compass Course Confirmation by lump sum or designated payment dates; individual payment plans via the college finance office.
- Payment requested for Essential Student Learning Items and Optional Items and Voluntary Financial Contributions made prior to the commencement of the year in which the materials and services are to be used.

FAMILY SUPPORT OPTIONS

Government assistance programs:

- Camps, Sport and Excursions Fund (CSEF) application and information provided in enrolment and re-enrolment process, newsletters, college website and via Compass.
- State Schools Relief provide support to school items and only responds to requests from our Wellbeing team. Refer to consideration of hardship.

Secondhand school items:

- Sustainable School Shop provide secondhand school items. www.sustainableschoolshop.com.au.
- College secondhand uniform shop.

College loans:

- For families identified as experiencing hardship by our Wellbeing team, items may be available to loan e.g. text books, graphic calculators.

CONSIDERATION OF HARDSHIP

- Parents/Guardians/Caregivers experiencing hardship should contact the Head of Wellbeing on 9579 1044.
- Status and details of financial arrangements will be kept confidential and only shared with relevant school personnel.

COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES

- The Parent Payment Policy available on the school website.
- Parent Payment Policy provided annually upon re-enrolment and enrolment process.
- School Council Charges provided annually upon re-enrolment and enrolment process.
- Payment requests will be broadly itemised within the appropriate category.
- Request for payment of Essential Student learning Items, Optional items and Voluntary Financial Contributions provided in October/November of the preceding year via Compass Course Confirmation.
- Only the initial invitation for Voluntary Financial Contributions and one reminder notice for this category provided to all parents/guardians/caregivers.
- Invoices/statements for unpaid School Council Charges for Essential Student Learning Items and/or Optional Items accepted by parents generated and distributed on a regular basis, but not more than once a month.
- Parents/Guardians/Caregivers general inquiries about charges should contact the Finance Office/Business Manager.

MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY

- Students not treated differently, denied access to the standard curriculum program, or refused instruction based on the nonpayment of Essential Student Learning Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions. However students will not be considered (optional items-activities the student purchases) extra curriculum program: instrumental music program; sports academy, function, formals and activities, interstate or overseas tours or exchange until all parent payments for the Essential Student Learning items have been paid in full.
- Students not denied access to enrolment or advancement to the next year level as a condition of payment of Essential Student Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.
- Communication with parents provides a clear description of each of the three parent payment categories, Essential Student Learning Items, Optional Items or Voluntary Financial Contributions.
- Parents and guardians provided with an alternative education program for their children if they choose not to participate in an excursion or camp.
- Bentleigh Secondary College administrative and financial processes are compliant with Departmental requirements such as CASES 21 financial reporting.

The School Council Finance Sub-committee will monitor the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of the policy and report back to School Council in time for the policy to be reviewed prior to invoices being sent out for the following year.

Reviewed annually

Date of approval by School Council

(21 August 2018)