

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/carers 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.

These items include:

- materials that the student takes possession of, including student stationery, communication diaries and the school year book.
- materials for learning and teaching where the student consumes, or takes possession of, the finished articles e.g. cooking, visual arts, student eLearning packages such as Reading Eggs, Mathletics, Eduplex etc,
- VCAL applied learning and industry specific program materials and costs.
- excursions/incursions associated with the standard curriculum will incur an additional charge throughout the year.

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.

These items include:

- extra-curricular programs or activities e.g. cheerleading, sailing, inter-schools sports, community connections programs, camps, travel training, swimming, debutante ball, class photographs etc.

Voluntary Financial Contributions

Parents can be invited to make a non-compulsory donation to the school for a general or specific purpose, e.g. school grounds projects (e.g. new playground or bike education, landscaping/gardening projects). 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. by December in 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 will be sent out at the beginning of each term (as per DE&T guidelines) or according to the parent payment arrangement with the school.
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Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund (CSEF) payment for families

Families holding a valid means-tested concession card or temporary foster parents are eligible to apply. In addition students 16 years and over who hold a pension card are eligible to apply. \$125 per year is paid for eligible primary school students, with \$225 per year paid for eligible secondary school students. Payments are made directly to the school and are tied to the student. Some common examples of school-organised programs for which the CSEF payment may be used include:

- School camps/trips
- Swimming and other school-organised sporting programs
- Outdoor education programs
- Excursions/incursions

Hume Valley School will communicate with eligible parents/carers to advise how the school intends to allocate the CSEF payment for the benefit of the eligible student.

The CSEF payment cannot be used towards voluntary school charges, nor towards books, stationery, school uniforms, graduations, etc.

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 Hume Valley School’s development of its parent payments, our school council 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.

Parents/carers will be provided with early notice of payment requests for essential education items, additional extras and voluntary financial contributions (i.e. by December in the previous school year).

Payment requests will be kept to a minimum. Payment requests and letters will be fair and reasonable. To further assist parents with payments, several payment options are available:

- Full amount
- Half yearly payment (beginning of Terms (1 & 3))
- Payment at the beginning of each term
- Other payment arrangements by negotiation

Alternative payment options are available through the school. Parents/carers are encouraged to make an appointment with the school to discuss their individual circumstances and available options.



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](#).

References: School Policy and Advisory Guide

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/governance/spag/default.htm>

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/management/Pages/parentpayments.aspx>

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/csef.aspx>

Review: this policy is to be reviewed annually each year.

Ratified By School Council:	December 2016
Review Date:	November 2017



"Learning for Life"